

THE PROBLEM OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

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A T H E S I S

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. in candidacy for the

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## INTRODUCTION.

The problem of John the Baptist is the problem of his personality. Was he, as the Evangelists suggest, merely a Voice in the Wilderness - a Voice which served its purpose for a very brief space of time in preparing the Way, and then was rudely silenced leaving scarcely an echo in the pages of history, or was he a preacher whose ministry lasted longer and was more independent and of greater consequence for Christian origins than the Gospels allow? What were the motives which led him to summon the people to baptism, and what views did he hold as to the significance of his baptism? Did he form a band of disciples, intending that they should carry on his work after his death, or was the influence of his personality such that his followers, without any warrant from John himself, perpetuated his teaching, and upheld it to the danger of Christianity? Does the prominent part which he takes in the Mandaean literature point in the same direction, and is the Mandaean Sect itself to be regarded as a continuing Baptist Sect? Wherein lay the true significance of the Baptist's ministry? Did he announce a political programme, or was he purely a moral reformer? In either case, what was his contribution to the



thought of the time, and his place in his environment? Finally, what were the historical relations between Jesus and John? How far did the former come under the spell of the personality of the latter? How far, if at all, was the latter conscious of the role of the former, and in what way did he prepare the world for Jesus?

In dealing with this problem, certain important facts should be kept constantly in mind.

(1) The meagreness of the evidence relating to the Baptist in our sources constitutes a source of danger, in that the critic is tempted to invent imaginary details about that figure in an attempt to arrive at greater fulness and precision. Whatever conjectures, therefore, are made, will be supported as far as possible by the best available evidence. This is not always possible, however, and in certain cases, the right is claimed to exercise the historical imagination, the results of which must be judged by their inherent probability.

(2) The portrait of the Baptist was drawn more than half a century after his death. Allowance must be made, therefore, for certain modifications which may have crept in - modifications due partly to the point of view of the narrators themselves, and partly to the developing theology of the Early Church. It was almost inevitable that the early trad-

ition should have been coloured by these factors and it is the task of the critic to determine to what extent this process has taken place.

(3) The close contact between Jesus and John very greatly increases the difficulty of arriving at the exact significance of the latter. It would be a much easier task to estimate the significance of any one of the O.T. prophets on the one hand, or even of Paul on the other, inasmuch as their histories stand out clear cut, and were not overshadowed by that of Jesus. The Evangelists experienced the same difficulty. Oral and written tradition may have preserved a considerable amount of material regarding the Baptist, but very much more about Jesus. The two names would often be linked together, and the precise significance of the Baptist may have been somewhat puzzling to the Evangelists themselves. In any case, they were concerned primarily with Jesus, and, captivated by his personality, unconsciously left, we may well believe, the Baptist in the shadow. But to what extent did they do this consciously? This is the really crucial point, for behind it lies the true personality of John the Baptist.

In the elucidation of the problem, the New Testament evidence is placed first and foremost. It is approached with all due caution, inasmuch as the Synoptics have no claim

to being regarded as historical works, in our sense of the term. Their primary object is to proclaim the Good News about Jesus, and everything else is subordinated to this. They are composed of popular traditions which emphasise this fact.<sup>1</sup> In the Fourth Gospel it is evident that the material is chosen from an apologetic point of view, and that it therefore calls for more careful and more cautious examination. In this connexion it may be stated generally here that the Synoptics seem to the present writer to contain more reliable information about the Baptist than the Fourth Gospel, and that the most valuable sections in the Synoptics are undoubtedly the Words of Jesus (Herrnworte).<sup>2</sup> Secondly comes the extra-canonical evidence. There is a chapter on the value of this evidence, and where it is found to be reliable after critical examination, it is placed alongside the New Testament evidence. Finally, acknowledgment is due to previous writers in this field, whose works are mentioned in the text or in the footnotes.

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1. Cf. Dibelius: Die urchristliche Überlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer, p.1, "Writings of this type follow no historical purpose in the modern sense: they do not narrate a life of Jesus: they do not set forth a history of John: they proclaim the Gospel." On the other hand, the tendency might be, where they do mention John, to stress unduly his affinities with Jesus.
  2. Cf. Dibelius: op.cit., p.2, "In the original words of Jesus, there speaks one who had been a contemporary of the Baptist, one, the purpose of whose life was closely connected with that of John's. His sayings, then, where authenticity is certain, are better sources for the history of John, than those, composed by the Evangelists from the point of view of the early Christian community."

This work does not claim to give, except in the reconstruction and summary at the end, a chronological sequence of events, or in other words, a history of John the Baptist. Interest is centred more upon his personality, in the widest sense of the word, and upon his significance for Christian origins. However, as the historical relations between Jesus and John must be considered, it is advisable to discuss the time of the Baptist's birth, ministry, and death, in order that Jesus and John may be viewed in their true perspective.

The material is presented in the following form and order. In Chapter I the value of the external evidence is discussed, particularly the evidence of Josephus and the Slavonic Fragments, and an effort is made to decide how far it may be allowed weight in the solving of the problem. In Chapter II the chronology of John the Baptist is dealt with, and in Chapters III, IV, and V the baptism, the disciples, and the ministry of the Baptist are considered respectively for the light which they throw upon his significance. In Chapter VI the relations of Jesus and John are estimated. Finally conclusions are drawn, and a short reconstruction of the history of John the Baptist is given.

An endeavour has been made throughout to paint a pen-portrait of the Baptist, as he lived, baptised and ministered, as accurately and as dispassionately as possible, a portrait,

undistorted on the one hand by extreme conservatism of outlook, and on the other, by a radicalism which deems the Gospels to be no more than "a naive and touching legend".<sup>1</sup>

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1. Eisler: The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist, English Ed., p.92.

## CHAPTER I

### THE VALUE OF THE EXTRA-CANONICAL EVIDENCE

#### A. The Evidence of Josephus.

Any attempt to estimate the significance of John the Baptist must take into account the evidence of Josephus and any attempt to evaluate his evidence will be largely based on whatever view is taken as to the reliability of Josephus as a historian. Another factor, too, should be taken into consideration. It should be ascertained whether the historian's statement on the Baptist has been worked over by a Christian censor, who has obscured and altered Josephus' own opinion, in order to bring the portrait of the Baptist into harmony with the traditional portrait.

Josephus was born in Jerusalem in the year of the accession of the Emperor Caligula (37-38 A.D.). His father's name was Matthias and his mother, he tells us, belonged to the aristocratic Asamonaean family.<sup>1</sup> At the early age of fourteen he was consulted by the Rabbis on points of law, and he makes it clear that his talents surpassed those of the ordinary run of men. At the age of sixteen he started his University training and after a careful study of the tenets of the Essenes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, followed by

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1. Loeb Josephus, I, p.2.

three rigorous years of ascetic life in the wilderness as a disciple of the Essene Bannus, he returned to Jerusalem and attached himself to the Pharisaic party, traces of whose doctrines are to be found in plenty of his works. Desirous of pursuing a practical rather than a purely theoretical career, he was at pains to supplement his Aramaic mother-tongue with a knowledge of Greek, and in 64 A.D. he visited Rome ostensibly to procure the release of some Jewish priests, but actually to secure an appointment from the Emperor. He succeeded in enlisting the favour of Poppaea, the Emperor's wife, and apparently greatly impressed the authorities by his wealth of learning.<sup>1</sup> Up to this point, probably, Josephus had the interests of his countrymen at heart. Dazzled, however, by the splendour and might of Rome, he gradually came to perceive how hopeless Jewish resistance to Rome would be. His return to Jerusalem coincided with the outbreak of the Jewish war of independence, and from this time it seems that Josephus threw in his lot with whichever side was winning. It is not unlikely that Josephus was a Zealot at first, because he was apparently given either supreme command, or an important commission in Galilee by the revolutionary committee, though

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1. Loeb Josephus, I, p.9.

the accounts of this period of life are not quite clear.<sup>1</sup> He had little administrative ability and the double role which he was now playing soon awakened the suspicions both of his own countrymen and of the Romans. On June 8th, 67 A.D., he was besieged by Vespasian's army in Jotapata, and taken prisoner after forty-seven days' siege. His life was spared because, as he tells us, he flattered Vespasian by prophesying that he, Vespasian, and his son, Titus, would be Emperors. It seems more likely, however, that the real reason for this act of clemency was, as Eisler thinks, the fact that he had remained in touch all along with the Roman intelligence department.<sup>2</sup> From this time his progress was rapid. He was given a gift of estates in Palestine, taken to Rome, and granted a place in the Imperial household, but happy, in all this, he could scarcely have been. He tells us that he was now between two fires, suspected of treachery by the Romans, and hated with peculiar intensity by the Jews. The date of his death is uncertain, but he outlived Agrippa II, who, according to Photius, died in 100 A.D..

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1. Vita, 14.(77). Compare this with B.J. ii.20.4. (568). The divergence in the accounts is due to the fact that the B.J. was written under Roman patronage while the Vita was an apologia in face of Jewish accusation.

2. Op.cit., p.26.



It is difficult to form a just estimate of the character of Josephus. Undoubtedly there were traits in it which cannot be admired, his boasting, his indecision, his obsequiousness. But allowance must be made for the circumstances in which he found himself. Like others he surrendered to the lure of Imperial favour, yet, no doubt, he was right in his conviction that resistance to Rome was futile. The feeling remains that he did, indeed, retain to the last a certain yearning for his countrymen and that his bitter description of his lot is really genuine. Thackeray,<sup>1</sup> however, perhaps goes too far in singing his praises, while Eisler paints altogether too cruel and vindictive a portrait of the historian, referring to him as an 'ambitious bureaucrat', a 'young scape-grace', and even as 'an old sinner and scoundrel'.<sup>2</sup>

How far can the evidence of Josephus be trusted? Certainly it must be taken in some cases cum grano salis. Yet it is tolerably certain that wherever Josephus' own personal attitude and behaviour are not in question, his evidence may be regarded as of very definite worth. He had access to the official reports of the Emperors, and derived much of his material from Nicolaus of Damascus who lived in the time of Herod and Augustus and wrote a Universal History in 144

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1. Josephus, The Man and the Historian.
  2. Op.cit., passim.

books. "He should be carefully studied", writes Foakes Jackson, "before he is condemned, or refused his place as the great historian of Judaism, and an invaluable contributor to our knowledge of antiquity."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it is unlikely that he would offend the Emperor to whom he owed his position, and the inference undoubtedly is that references to Christianity would require cautious handling. The famous Testimonium<sup>2</sup> has almost certainly been worked over to a certain extent, at least, by a Christian hand, and it must be determined whether the passage dealing with John the Baptist has been similarly interpolated.<sup>3</sup>

Consideration, however, must first be given to a very pointed argument, supporting, it is held,<sup>4</sup> a Christian censorship of the text of Josephus so extensive and thorough-going in character as practically to clinch the spurious nature of the rest of the extant evidence in its present form, viz., the silence of Josephus regarding John the Baptist and Jesus in his earlier work known as the Jewish War issued between 75 and 79 A.D.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Josephus and the Jews, p.xvi. 2. Antiq.xviii.3.3.(63ff.)  
 3. Antiq.xviii.5.2.(116ff.). 4. Eisler: op.cit., pp.63ff.  
 5. "The title by which the author refers to his work is 'Concerning the Jewish War' (Περὶ τοῦ Ἰουδαϊκοῦ Πολέμου, Vita 412, Antiq.xx.258, cf.xviii.11) .... The expanded form, 'Ἰουδαϊκοῦ Πολέμου πρὸς Ῥωμαίους' found at the head of the first two books in Niese's principal MS, P, may, it has been suggested, be an attempt of the author to neutralise the offensive character of the former superscription. But the majority of the MSS employ another title, "Concerning (the) Capture" (Περὶ ἁλώσεως) ..... The short title is one which the author may well have employed himself." Thackeray; Loeb Josephus II, pp.vii-viii.

The difficulty cannot be satisfactorily overcome by supposing that in the interval between the composition of the Jewish War and the Antiquities (94 A.D.), Josephus had become acquainted with the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, and had heard from them of Jesus for the first time. Such is the opinion of Renan<sup>1</sup> who believes that the Gospels have magnified out of all due proportion the circumstances of the life and death of Jesus, and that these were, by comparison with other events of the times, really insignificant in contemporary eyes. Dibelius<sup>2</sup> supposed the omission to be due to the lowly social position of Jesus and his followers, but this opinion too, seems scarcely satisfactory. In view of this, is it possible only to adopt Eisler's theory of deliberate and very sweeping Christian censorship? There is still another possibility which, so far as the present writer is aware, has hitherto escaped attention.

The Jewish War was issued in its Greek form between 75 A.D. and 79 A.D., only a few years after Nero's dread edict against the Christians occasioned by the great fire in Rome in 64 A.D.. Tertullian remarks of this edict: Permansit erasis omnibus hoc solum institutum Neronianum.<sup>3</sup>

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"This edict alone remained valid when all the other edicts

1. La Vie de Jésus, p.388.

2. Theologische Blätter, 6, 1927, pp.213ff. Cited by Eisler: op.cit., p.64.

3. Ad Nationes, 1:7.

of Nero were cancelled"(on his death). Now the tactful historian, writing with this comparatively recent threat in mind, would surely deem it better to pass over in silence the history of the Founder of Christianity and also that of John the Baptist who was so closely associated with him. The memory of all the horrors which attended the persecution of Nero would not altogether have so quickly vanished, and it is only natural to suppose that Josephus would consider it advisable, in his own interests, at least, if not in the Christians', to avoid any reference to these historical figures. By 93-94 A.D., however, thirty years after the event, the keenness of the past horrors would have been blunted. The Christians had enjoyed peace, precarious though it was, under Vespasian and Titus, and as yet, Domitian, however touchy and suspicious, had not actually raised his hand against them. Josephus, then, may well have felt that a short account of Jesus and the Baptist would not be out of place in his Antiquities. He may have felt that he could risk such an account then, for was not Christianity a 'religio licita', and in any case the Antiquities would appear incomplete in the eyes of his public without reference to the most prominent figures connected with Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

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1. If the Jewish War was issued in its final form in 96 A.D., (so Eisler: op.cit., and Laqueur: Der jüdische Historiker Flavius Josephus), which does not, however, seem probable, the renewal of persecution by Domitian in 95 A.D. would account for the further omission of any reference to Jesus and John in the final edition!

The fact that Josephus does not think it necessary "to impose upon himself the slightest reserve, when he comes to speak of the other Messiahs of this troublesome period"<sup>1</sup> is easily explicable. The persecution of Nero was directed against a sect which had outlived its Founder, a sect whose membership was increasing daily. Silence in their case was tactful, but what need to be silent about these other Messiahs whose uprisings had been quickly exploded, and of whose followers there remained but little trace after the death of their leaders? Perhaps the silence of Josephus in the Jewish War may be more feasibly explained along these lines, than by supposing it to be due to a Christian censorship so radical and wholesale as Eisler proposes.

It would appear, then, that as any preconceived idea of a Christian censorship on a grand scale may be confidently dismissed, the Baptist passage in the Antiquities may now be examined to determine whether it has entirely escaped the censor's pen. The passage may be rendered as follows:<sup>2</sup>

"But some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army was the work of God, who thus exacted a very just retribution for John, surnamed, the Baptist. For Herod slew him, a good man, who bade the Jews practise virtue, both by acting justly towards one another, and piously to-

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1. Eisler: op.cit., p.68.

2. Antiq. xviii.5.2.(116ff.).

wards God, and to assemble for baptism. For immersion, he held, was acceptable to God, if employed, not for the begging off of certain sins, but for the purification of the body, when the soul had been previously cleansed by righteousness. Now, when people flocked to him - for they were greatly pleased ( $\eta\epsilon\theta\eta\sigma\alpha\nu$ )<sup>1</sup> by hearing his words - Herod, fearing that his great persuasive powers with men might cause some kind of revolt, (for the people seemed ready to do anything he advised), deemed it far better to forestall and kill him before some sedition arose through him, rather than rue his delay when plunged into the turmoil of such an uprising. And so, through Herod's suspicion, John was sent as a prisoner to Machaerus, the aforementioned fortress, and there slain. The Jews therefore thought that the destruction of Herod's army was the penalty inflicted on him to avenge John, God being wroth with Herod."

The notice is remarkably concise and sober, and extremely favourable to John the Baptist. Schürer writes, "Suspicion is awakened by the favourable estimate of John, who could have been regarded with sympathy by Josephus only on one side, as an ascetic and a preacher of morality, but not as a prophet of the Coming Messiah, who powerfully moved the people...."<sup>2</sup> - this in view of Josephus' position as

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1. So Niese, with some MSS. of Eusebius: but all other MSS. have  $\eta\epsilon\theta\eta\sigma\alpha\nu$  = "they were (greatly) elated".

2. A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ: I, vol.ii, p.25, note 24.

court historian, and his conviction of the hopelessness of resisting the Roman might. Eisler, too, takes the same line, and believes that a Christian hand has been at work in the phrases underlined.<sup>1</sup> Thus, "a very just retribution" is to be regarded as a pathetic exclamation of assent on the part of a Christian sympathiser with Jesus and John. Instead of "a good man" a "wild man" stood in the original - a change effected by the alteration of only two letters ἀγαθόν > ἄγριον. The significance of John's baptism has been deliberately altered to its disadvantage by the transposition of "not for" and "but for". The true text should run, "For immersion, he held, was acceptable to God, if employed for the begging off of certain sins, and not for the purification of the body." For the expression "When people (τῶν ἄλλων) flocked to him", "when the masses (τῶν πολλῶν) flocked to him" should be read. Instead of "they were greatly pleased at listening to his words", the original was "they were greatly elated by hearing him" (effected by changing ε to ζ). Finally, instead of "the Jews" in the last sentence, "some of the Jews" was what Josephus really wrote, not implying that the Jews as a body regarded the destruction of Herod's army as an act of God, but given this significance by the sympathetic interpolator.

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1. Op.cit., pp.246-250.

Ingenious as these suggestions may be, they seem to be quite unconvincing. The change from "pleased" to "elated" is doubtless correct, but this was merely a variant reading in the MSS due to a scribal error, and need not indicate Christian censorship. There was certainly nothing in the Baptist's preaching, as will be seen,<sup>1</sup> calculated to give pleasure: it was much more likely to "elate" in the sense of "to stir" or "to excite", whether or no it was actually designed to do so. τῶν ἄλλων is quite intelligible as denoting "people in general" and is not infrequently employed loosely by Greek writers in this sense. There remain the alleged alteration of the significance of John's baptism, which is not of immediate interest here, and the statements that John was a "good man", and that Herod's punishment by God appeared to "the Jews" as a body "very just".

Now, from all this, one point clearly emerges. Had a Christian censor been at work on this passage he would certainly have done his work more thoroughly and betrayed himself more unmistakably. The fact that the passage "omits the distinctive emphasis upon the Messianic teaching of John"<sup>2</sup> weighs very strongly against the view of Christian manipulation. Again, although Josephus calls John "a good man" despite his apparently being the means of stirring up some kind

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1. Chapter V, The Ministry of John the Baptist, pp.260ff.

2. Macgregor and Purdy: Jew and Greek: Tutors unto Christ, p.113.



of likely revolution, this is not really so surprising as it might at first appear when considered in its correct historical setting. True, if the passage were to be understood as meaning that John was actively stirring up a rebellion against the Romans, the words could not possibly have come from the pen of Josephus, and Schürer's objection would hold good. But there is nothing in the notice to indicate that Josephus is here alluding to the Roman authorities specifically. He is having a tilt at Herod Antipas. Now, in the Jewish War, Josephus displays, it is true, a very favourable attitude to the Herodian family, but in the Antiquities it is noticeable that this attitude has completely changed,<sup>1</sup> and that on more than one occasion he severely censures members of the Herodian family, describing their atrocities in the most outspoken manner. It is very possible, then, that in the Baptist passage, we have a reflection of that change of attitude, and that Josephus is boldly pointing out that as a result of John's activity, the people were stirred up against the crimes and infamies of one of the more notorious of the Herods, Herod Antipas. Such an attitude on the historian's part would scarcely prejudice his position as court-historian. The Emperor generally demanded that administration in territories

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1. Cf. Thackeray: op.cit., p.53.

directly or indirectly under his rule should be just and fair, and from the time of Augustus the provincials were much less likely to suffer from the mal-administration of an unscrupulous governor than before. The governors themselves were carefully chosen. "They could be withdrawn from an Imperial province at any time if the Emperor so desired, and rarely governed a Senatorial province for more than a year. The machinery for bringing complaints to Rome was greatly improved and a successful prosecution for 'repetundae' would ruin a man's career."<sup>1</sup> The relations between the Emperors and the Herods, their none-too-willing representatives, illustrate this principle. Archelaus, for instance, was banished in 6 A.D. for incompetent administration and his province given to an Imperial procurator. Herod Antipas, it is true, merited at first the praise of Tiberius for his administrative ability, but subsequently lost favour, and was banished from his dominions in 39-40 A.D. on a charge of plotting against the Emperor. For the most part Antipas seems to have been hard, mercenary, and sensuous, and Josephus, though silent about this, out of deference, no doubt, to his patron Agrippa, does not hide the fact that John was indeed "a good man", and that Herod's punishment appeared to the Jews as a body "very just". He had nothing

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1. Cambridge Ancient History, vol.x, p.192.

to lose by telling the truth in this matter, at least, and the passage as it stands very probably contains Josephus' original and unaltered opinions.<sup>1</sup>

The evidence of Josephus on John the Baptist appears, then, to be genuine as it stands. It is clear, however, that we have not got the whole portrait. His silence as to the Messianic activity of John is nevertheless readily understandable as due to the historian's desire to give no offence to his Graeco-Roman readers, and is entirely in line with his customary silence on that point. The evidence of Josephus conflicts with the Gospel evidence according to which the Baptism of John had a moral and not a purificatory significance, and apparently also in attributing the death of John to political reasons. These matters will be considered in subsequent chapters in their natural place,<sup>2</sup> but for the sake of clarity and completeness it may be stated here that the view is taken (a) that Josephus was mistaken in believing that John's baptism was simply for bodily purification and (b) that he was right in attributing the Baptist's death to political reasons, although these arose indirectly and un-

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1. An additional point is that Josephus emphasizes that John was a preacher of virtue. Throughout his history he is at pains to show that Judaism could boast of many such moralistic preachers. In virtue of this, the designation of "A good man" is very appropriate.
  2. The evidence re. baptism in Chapter III; the evidence re. political significance in Chapter V.

designedly. On this point the Gospel evidence and Josephus need not be regarded as irreconcilable but rather as supplementary to each other.<sup>1</sup>

### B. The Evidence of the Slavonic Fragments.

If the evidence just examined is read in conjunction with the Baptist passage in the Slavonic Fragments, and if these Fragments can be regarded as a genuine statement of Josephus, they would powerfully alter, it would seem, the traditional picture of John the Baptist, as may be seen from the following extracts:-

(a) "Now at that time there walked among the Jews a man in wondrous garb, for he had stuck on to his body animals' hair wherever it was not covered by his own. But in countenance he was like a savage. This man came to the Jews and allured them to freedom saying, 'God hath sent me to shew you the way of the law, by which ye shall be freed from many tyrants. And no mortal shall rule over you but only the Highest who sent me'. And when the people heard that, they were glad. And he did nothing else to them save that he dipped them in the stream of the Jordan and let them go, warning them that they should renounce evil deeds. So would they be given a King who would free them and subject all who

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1. Such also is the opinion of Dibelius: op.cit., p.124; Heitmüller: R.G.G., I, iii, p.590; Klausner: Jesus of Nazareth, p.240.

are insubordinate, but he himself would be subjected to none. At his words, some mocked, but others put faith in him. And when he was brought to Archelaus and the learned doctors of the law had assembled, they asked him who he was, and where he had been till then. And he answered and said, 'I am a man; as such has the Spirit of God called me, and I live on bulrushes and roots and wood-shavings.' But when they threatened to torture him if he did not desist from these words and deeds, he said, 'It is meet rather for you to desist from your shameful works and to submit to the Lord your God.' And Simon, a scribe, arose in wrath, and said, 'We read the divine books every day. But thou, only now come like a wild beast from the woods, durst thou teach us and lead the multitudes astray with thy accursed speeches?' And he flung himself forward to rend his body. But he said in reproach to them 'I will not reveal to you the secret which is among you, because you desired it not. For this cause has unspeakable misfortune befallen you and for your own doing.' And when he had thus spoken he went away to the other side of Jordan. And since no man durst hinder him, he did as he had done before. Archelaus, however, ever since he had taken possession of his ethnarchy, mindful of the enmity of the Jews, harassed them with intolerable oppression, likewise also the Samaritans.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Trans. taken from Eisler: The Messiah Jesus, pp. 224ff.; cf. Thackeray: Loeb Josephus III, pp. 644ff.

(b) "While Philip was in power, he saw a dream in which an eagle plucked out both his eyes. And he called all his wise men together. When some had explained the dream in this manner, and some in that, there came to him suddenly without being called that man of whom we have written above, how he went about (clothed) in animals' hair and cleansed the people in the waters of the Jordan. And he spoke: 'Hear the word of the Lord: the dream which thou hast seen: the eagle is thy venality, for that bird is brutal and rapacious. And this sin shall take away thine eyes, which are thy dominion and thy wife.' And when he had thus spoken, Philip expired before the evening, and his dominion was given to Agrippa. And his wife was taken by Herod his brother. Because of her, all law-abiding people abhorred him, but they durst not accuse him to his face. But only that man whom we have called a wild man, came to him in wrath and spoke: 'Because thou hast taken thy brother's wife, thou transgressor of the law, even as thy brother has died a merciless death, so also shalt thou be cut off by the heavenly sickle. For the divine decrees will not be silenced, but will destroy thee through sore afflictions in other lands; because thou art not raising up seed to thy brother, but satisfying fleshly lusts and committing adultery, since he has left children.' But Herod when he heard that was wroth, and

ordered him to be beaten and driven away. But he, where-soever he found Herod, never ceased to accuse him, until Herod grew furious and ordered him to be slain. Now his (John's) nature was strange and his ways were not human. For even as a fleshless spirit, so lived this man. His mouth knew no bread not even at the passover feast did he taste of the unleavened bread, saying: "In remembrance of God who redeemed the people from bondage is this given to eat, and for the flight only since the journey was in haste." But wine and strong drink he would not so much as allow to be brought nigh him. And he loathed (to eat) any animal. And every act of injustice he exposed. And wood-shavings served for his needs."<sup>1</sup>

The impression created by these extracts, particularly the first, is undoubtedly that John was something more than an innocuous preacher of morals. The words "No mortal shall rule over you", "ye shall be freed from many tyrants", "they would be given a king who would free them", seem to be of quite definite political import. J.W.Jack<sup>2</sup> believes that these expressions need not suggest any political activity on John's part but that they are capable of being interpreted in a moral and spiritual way. Thus "no mortal shall rule over you" and "they would be given a King who would

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1. Eisler: op.cit., pp.229ff.

2. The Historic Christ, pp.115ff.

free them" are entirely in line with the theocratic objective of John's ministry, as reported in the New Testament. Similarly, "freedom from many tyrants", he explains as meaning "freedom from the tyranny of evil". It is not altogether impossible to interpret the passages in this way, but certainly, it does not seem to be very natural, and Eisler is perhaps right in so far as he understands the words as being of political rather than of moral significance. Relying on this evidence, however, he proceeds to manipulate the text, and after a bewildering series of excisions and corrections, coupled with an amazing twisting of the Gospel texts, often carried out in the most arbitrary fashion, he produces the following theory regarding John the Baptist and Jesus, based on his corrected text.

"A rabbi is reported as working spectacular cures on the Mount of Olives: the mob gathers round him and plans a Messianic rising in which Jesus is to figure as God's Anointed, the liberator-king. When the hierarchy and through them Pilate, hear of it, a military attack is made on the crowd on the Mount of Olives, just as was made by Felix a number of years later. But whereas, then, the pseudo-Messiah disappeared in the crowd never to be seen again, Jesus is arrested, brought up for judgment, and the plot, having thus been frustrated, crucified for the mere weakness



of having consented to the plot, just as Theudas was taken alive, and without trial beheaded, or hewn in pieces."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus, then, according to Eisler, was merely a political rebel, a leader of a band of revolutionaries seeking Jewish independence, and guilty of high treason. John the Baptist, like Jesus, was also a political rebel. He was Feldgeistlicher or field-chaplain of the revolutionaries from the time of Archelaus, and filled with the desire to be freed from many tyrants, bound his followers by a 'sacramentum militare' or military oath which took the form of a special lustral rite.<sup>2</sup> Brought before the Sanhedrin, he declared himself, Eisler assures us, to be the Messiah<sup>3</sup> and was allowed at length to return to the desert. Far from ceasing his political activity, he redoubled his efforts, preaching that the Messianic liberator-king was at hand. A fresh revolt was planned and 'those on the war-path'<sup>4</sup> consulted John as to what they were to do. The revolt was suppressed and John returned to the desert "causing consternation with his ever and anon repeated announcement of the coming terror of the last days, now and then baptising newly won fighters for the last Messianic war."<sup>5</sup> At this point Jesus resorted to John. At first his attitude was one of quietism, but on

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1. The Messiah Jesus, pp.458-459.

2. Id., p.270.

3. "Enash'ana, (Hebrew 'Enosh 'ani), 'I am a man', i.e., "the reborn Enosh foretold in Daniel's vision (7:13), i.e. the Messiah." Eisler: op.cit., p.232.

4. Lk. 3: 14.

5. Eisler: op.cit., p.567.

the failure of this policy, first an exodus, and then a revolt were planned, with the disastrous results already described. Finally in 35 A.D. John emerged once more from the deserts to denounce the unlawful marriage of Antipas, and to continue his political activities, but this time he was arrested and executed.

In view of all this, and of the severe judgment which other scholars have passed on Eisler's critical methods,<sup>1</sup> the Slavonic Fragments must be examined to determine what claims they have to be ranked as trustworthy evidence.

These Fragments, Zusätze, or Additions, on John the Baptist and Jesus appear in the Slavonic Version of Josephus' Jewish War. Some of them were published in Russian as early as 1866 by Popov, and others in 1879 by Sreznevski. They were brought to the notice of Western scholars in 1893 by Bonwetsch, and critically examined by Berendts in 1906.<sup>2</sup> He believed that they were based on an Aramaic edition of the

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1. Goguel: Au Seuil de l'Évangile, Jean-Baptiste, p.299, "There is in Eisler's critical method something so violent and arbitrary as almost to rule out any sensible discussion." Cf. G.H.C. Macgregor: Expository Times, May, 1935, pp.355ff; Lagrange: Revue Biblique, xxxix. (Jan.1930), pp.29-46, (espec. pp.33-39); Goguel: Revue Historique, clxii, (1929); Windisch: Neue Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Jugendbildung, vii. (1931), pp.289-307; J.M. Creed: Harv.Theol.Rev., xxv. (Oct.1932), pp.277-319.

2. Die Zeugnisse vom Christentum im slavischer 'De Bello Judaico' des Josephus, Texte und Untersuchungen, New Series, 14, 1906.

Jewish War, which preceded the Greek edition<sup>1</sup> and that they were intentionally suppressed to avoid giving offence to the Romans in the latter. Schürer<sup>2</sup> and Bauer<sup>3</sup> refuted the theories of Berendts, maintaining that the Slavonic Fragments were completely unauthentic. Apart from the highly conjectural theory of Goethals, to which Goguel draws attention,<sup>4</sup> according to which the Slavonic Fragments are drawn from the Souvenirs of Hegesippus, nothing further of consequence appeared till 1925, when Eisler in a lecture delivered to the German Philological Congress at Erlangen re-affirmed his belief in the authenticity of the Slavonic Fragments and made them the basis for his remarkable theories later published in The Messiah Jesus and other works. Since an admirable refutation of these theories has already been published by J.W.Jack<sup>5</sup>, it is necessary to notice only the salient points here.

Eisler's first theory was that the Slavonic Fragments were a direct translation, with certain Christian retouches

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1. In the Greek edition, 1, 1.1.(3)., Josephus states that he had written the Jewish War τῇ παλαιῇ, (presumably Aramaic, but possibly Hebrew) for the benefit of τοῖς ἀνω βαρβάροις i.e. the Semitic Eastern peoples.
  2. Theol.Literaturzeitung, 1906, coll.262-266.
  3. Das Leben Jesu im Zeitalter der neutestamentlichen Apokryphen, p.198, "That they come from the pen of Josephus, as they purport to, is quite impossible! They bear only too clearly the apocryphal stamp."
  4. Op.cit., p.22.
  5. The Historic Christ.

or interpolations, from the Aramaic version of the Jewish War, the MSS. of which had been preserved in the library of the Chazar Jewish rulers till the 10th century. But when it was clearly shown that the Slavonic Version must have been translated not from Aramaic but from Greek - there are numerous Greek words almost literally transcribed<sup>1</sup> - he affirmed that the Version in question was a translation made by a Russian priest into Old Slavonic in Lithuania (circa 1261) from a Byzantine copy of a lost earlier edition of the War in Greek entitled 'On the Capture of Jerusalem'. This earlier Greek edition, he holds, was a translation, made by the assistants of Josephus, of the original Semitic rough draft of the Jewish War (not the Aramaic Version), and therefore, removing the Christian retouches, the Slavonic Version or Halosis, as he calls it, provides very early and very trustworthy evidence, and, as compared with the Gospel narratives is in fact "a relief and a genuine intellectual satisfaction."<sup>2</sup>

The greatest objection to this theory is the fact that no satisfactory evidence can be produced for the existence of the earlier Greek edition of the Jewish War entitled Περὶ ῥήσεως. It is pure assumption that in 71 A.D. this edition was made to celebrate the triumph of Titus, and quite im-

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1. E.g. Igemon = ἡγεμών ; Katapetasma = καταπέτασμα.  
 skinopigja = σκηνοπηγία , etc.

2. The Messiah Jesus, preface, p.9.

probable that in the following years "the historian constantly improved this first draft by correcting mistakes, deleting passages which had proved distasteful to influential readers, and by adding new material".<sup>1</sup> Even if it did exist - but there is no trace of it in Greek MSS tradition - it is unlikely, in view of what has already been said regarding Nero's edict, that it would have contained any reference to John the Baptist and Jesus. Until Eisler can produce satisfactory evidence for the existence of this earlier draft, his whole theory must be judged in the light of this fatal initial weakness.

Apart from this, the nature of the contents of the Slavonic Version makes it altogether improbable that it goes back to Josephus. The anti-Roman attitude manifest throughout is quite unlike Josephus,<sup>2</sup> who would not have dared to use such a disparaging nomenclature as 'Italians' and 'Latins' when referring to the Romans, nor to have described them in the following terms,<sup>3</sup> "For such are the Latins: they run to accept presents and break their oath for the sake of presents", and again, "For (the Romans) are insatiable in receiving: but if anyone gives them more, tomorrow they want still more. And

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1. Eisler: The Messiah Jesus, p.27.

2. The Anti-Herodian attitude points in the same direction, but does not seem to be so convincing an argument, because of the later coolness of Josephus, (already noted), towards the Herodian family. Cf. Jack: op.cit., pp.52-59.

3. Eisler: op.cit., p.128.

as the sea cannot be filled, nor hell satisfied, nor woman's passion, even so are the Romans insatiable in receiving."

It is surely the limit of absurdity to explain away this, as Eisler does, by assuming that the servi librarii of Josephus were bribed to incorporate these passages by his enemies!<sup>1</sup>

The impression that the Slavonic Version is unauthentic is further confirmed by the many omissions, additions, and alterations, which distinguish it from the existing text of the Jewish War. Taken singly these differences do not present a convincing argument, for it would be natural to look for certain divergences at least between an earlier and a later edition, but their cumulative effect is wholly decisive. An excellent summary of these has been given by Jack<sup>2</sup> and Thackeray<sup>3</sup>. They need not be investigated in detail here, but the passages already quoted on John the Baptist, revealing as they do the inaccuracy and even the absurdity of certain of the differences, may be examined and regarded as typical.

The following points may be noted:-<sup>4</sup>

(a) The statement that on the death of Philip in 34 A.D., his province was given to Agrippa is not historically accurate. According to the Antiquities<sup>5</sup> Caligula on his accession

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1. Op.cit., p.130.

2. Op.cit., pp.59ff.

3. Loeb Josephus III, pp.635ff.; Slavonic Additions and Omissions.

4. Cf. Goguel: Jean-Baptiste, pp.26ff.

5. xviii.4.6.(108).

in 37 A.D. gave it to Agrippa, whereas in 34 A.D. it had been incorporated in the Roman province of Syria.

(b) The Fragments represent Philip as being the first husband of Herodias whereas the real name of her first husband was not Philip but Herod.<sup>1</sup> Further, they represent the second marriage of Herodias as taking place after the death of her first husband, whereas the Antiquities record that this took place during his lifetime.<sup>2</sup>

(c) The statement that 'the wild man' was brought before Archelaus involves a grave chronological difficulty.<sup>3</sup> Archelaus was deposed from office in 6 A.D., and hence the Baptist's activity would be thrown back to a period anterior to this date, while his ministry would be lengthened to cover more than thirty years, because he is represented also as reproaching Antipas for his unlawful marriage with Herodias after the death of her first husband, Philip, in 33 or 34 A.D. It will be seen from a study of the chronological data in the next chapter that there is no trustworthy evidence for assigning to the Baptist such an extended ministry.

1. The Gospels, strangely enough, commit the same error.  
 2. xviii.5.1.(109ff.).  
 3. Goguel: op.cit., p.38 points out that Goethals in Jean précurseur de Jésus, pp.17ff. has sought to eliminate this difficulty by reading ῥεχίερά instead of Ἀρχέλαον. Such a change, however, "is not very probable from a palaeographical point of view". In any case, the account of his appearance before the doctors of the law lacks any historical and natural conclusion. The narrative of his punishment savours more of legend than histor-

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(d) The violent attack on the doctors of the Law put into the mouth of the 'wild man', who bids them 'renounce their abominable works' cannot be assigned with any degree of confidence to Josephus, who nowhere in his writings evinces such an attitude to these scholars.

(e) The two-fold reference to the Baptist's means of sustenance, first in the Baptist Fragment (A) and then in the Philip Fragment (B), involves a clumsy repetition which Josephus, for all his occasional mediocrity of composition, could scarcely have countenanced.

(f) The account of Philip's dream requires no arguments to demonstrate its legendary and non-historical character, reminiscent, as it is, of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar.

The fact is that the Slavonic Version, with its chronological errors, its Christian retouches, its fanciful legends, and its violent anti-Roman attitude, betrays quite clearly its comparatively late origin and its untrustworthiness as a source on which to rely. As Jack puts it, "Are we to believe that Josephus first issued the one account and later on withdrew it, and inserted in our extant Version a totally different statement? Was the official Roman source not available to him at first? According to Eisler (in other parts of his book) it was, and was fully used by him. Why then should he pass over the official statements about John

when issuing his earlier edition, and use a less reliable source? The fact is, the Slavonic Fragment comes certainly from a different source, but it is a Christian one of an apocryphal nature, and Josephus had nothing to do with it."<sup>1</sup>

Who, then, was the author? There are very good reasons for believing that the Slavonic Version is a translation of a late Byzantine version of the Jewish War, the latter composed with the object of giving a Christian account of the Jewish War, and drawing possibly upon the Gospels, though this is not quite certain, but assuredly on apocryphal literature.<sup>2</sup> The Byzantine writer felt himself at liberty to rewrite the narrative of Josephus, and to insert certain notices on John the Baptist and Jesus which would fill the gap in the Jewish War and serve the practical purpose of influencing his readers in favour of Christianity. Interpolation was a common practice in early times, and was not at all regarded as forgery, and was very often carried out with amazing expertness, as Eisler has shown.<sup>3</sup> The anti-Roman attitude manifest in the Version points to its having been composed in the 12th century. "From the time of the schism (1054 A.D.) between the patriarch of Constantinople and the Roman pontiff, and especially after the Roman anarchy in Byzantium (1180-1204 A.D.) there was developed a deep-seated antagonism on the part of

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1. Op.cit., p.114.

2. Zeitlin: The Jewish Quarterly Review, XX, July 1930, pp.30ff.

3. The Messiah Jesus: passim.

the Byzantine Greeks against the Western people."<sup>1</sup> Against this background the bitter invectives against Rome are perfectly intelligible.

But a further, and a very important, inference is warrantable, perhaps. Granted that this ill-feeling existed between East and West at that time, it would not be too much to assume that the Byzantine copyist, characteristically enough, read back his own political animosities into the life of John the Baptist, thus suggesting that even those who were connected with the very beginnings of Christianity, had the courage and spirit to oppose and to defy the Roman government. This would account for the political significance which the Baptist almost certainly has in the Slavonic Fragments. It is to be further observed that the notice on the Baptist bears no trace of real hostility towards him<sup>2</sup> but is merely coloured by the outlook of the writer. This viewpoint seems to cover the facts better than to suppose, as Jack has done, that no political aspect is suggested in John's activity, as described by the Slavonic Fragments.

1. Jack: op.cit., p.51.

2. Eisler: op.cit., pp.225ff. believes that the notice is hostile to John. But the expression 'a wild man' surely means no more than a 'man of the country',  $\Pi\lambda\psi\psi\psi$  while other remarks, which he thinks derogatory, are really not so. Creed: op.cit., p.316, writes:- "It is tempting to conjecture that the figure of some contemporary eremite has influenced the portrait but attempts to discover any definite source have not been successful."

The translation into Slavonic was undertaken, according to Jack, by the Russian Orthodox Christian Church, and the Slavonic Version was very possibly used as propaganda material against the Judaizing heretics, who commenced their activities about 1470 under the leadership of one, Zacharias, and who, after experiencing various turns of fortune, were finally tried before an ecclesiastical court in 1503 and condemned to torture and death.<sup>1</sup> Now, it is remarkable that in the Fragments on John the Baptist and Jesus, passages in which, above all, one might have expected a Christian to betray himself clearly, there occur no very obvious characteristic Christian expressions. It is true that they seem to have the Gospels as their background, but had the author been a Christian, could he have refrained from mentioning or at least alluding to John's acknowledgment of the Messiahship of Jesus? Again, in the description of the Resurrection of Jesus, the following appears,

'And it was said, that after he was put to death, yea after burial in the grave, he was not found.

Some then, say that he is risen; but others that he has been stolen by his friends; I, however, do not know which speak more correctly.

For a dead man cannot rise of himself - though possibly with the help of another righteous man: unless he will be an

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1. Op.cit., pp.75ff.

angel or another of the heavenly powers, or God Himself appears as a man and accomplishes what he wills - both walks with men, and falls, and lies down and rises up, as it is according to His will.

But others said that it was not possible to steal him, because they had put guards around his grave, 30 Romans, but 1,000 Jews.<sup>1</sup>

Is it possible that a Christian could have described the Resurrection of Jesus in such guarded terms "hesitating in his judgment and frankly confessing his inability to make up his mind?"<sup>2</sup> Jack's explanation of this is too subtle. "It must be remembered", he writes,<sup>3</sup> "that the author of the passage, professing to write in the name of Josephus, had to maintain a certain amount of reserve. He could insinuate, hint, and suggest certain Christian facts, but could not allege or affirm them openly." But surely so ultra-rational and non-committal a method is quite foreign to the mentality of any convinced Christian, however much he might profess to write in the name of Josephus. It would demand in addition great literary skill - a feature which is by no means evident elsewhere in the Fragments under consideration. We may observe further that the assertion that John would not eat unleavened bread even at the Passover time, and the reference

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1. Follows B.J. v.5.4.(214) after the description of the Temple curtain. Cf. Thackeray: Loeb Josephus III, p.658.
  2. G.R.S.Mead: The Gnostic John the Baptizer, p.114.
  3. Op.cit., pp.165-166.

to the disciples as 'servants' are not at all distinctively Christian but rather Jewish conceptions.

It may be held, then, either that the Byzantine Version was written by a Jewish Christian rather than a Christian, or that the Slavonic translator was a Jewish Christian or a Jew, rather than a Christian. On the whole, it seems most satisfactory to regard the Byzantine Version as being of Christian origin, and the translator as having been a Jew. The Slavonic MSS appeared as late as the 15th or 16th century, just at the time when the Judaising heretics were at work. It is unnecessary to assume, as Eisler does,<sup>1</sup> and indeed, quite improbable in view of the vast amount of Christian material in the Version, that it was used as propaganda material by the Judaising heretics against the Orthodox Church. On the other hand, it is equally precarious, considering the Jewish material in the Version, to assume, as Jack does, that the translation was undertaken by the Orthodox Church and used against these heretics. A middle line seems best. Probably the Slavonic Fragments formed no propaganda material on either side, but the translation was undertaken by a Jew, who, acquainted with the Judaising movement, and at the same time, with the Christian Byzantine Version of the Jewish War, was puzzled by the conflicting ideas, and, uncertain with which side to throw in his lot,

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1. Op.cit., pp.155ff.

was anxious to state his case. Working on the Byzantine Version, he weighed the pros and cons, allowing certain Christian conceptions to stand, inserting here, deleting there, and betraying throughout his shaky knowledge of the Gospel facts. Hence, it would seem, we have the Slavonic Version with its Christian interpolations and its strange inconsistencies on the one hand, and its peculiar Jewish colouring on the other.

In the light of what has been said, the present writer has little hesitation in ruling out the Slavonic Fragments as untrustworthy evidence for a study of John the Baptist. As Goguel writes, referring to them, "Nous n'avons pas affaire à une relation historique mais à une fiction littéraire."<sup>1</sup> The way in which Eisler builds up his theories regarding John and Jesus on their basis is not merely characterised by an extreme arbitrariness of critical method, but if his theories are false, as indeed they seem to be in the opinion of other scholars, they can only exhibit "one of the most prodigious errors of judgment and method ever made in the domain of historical studies."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Op.cit., p.30.

2. Goguel: Revue Historique, clxii, (1929), p.218; cf. Windisch: op.cit., p.307, "In the end one can only say of Eisler: As regards the goal which he sought to reach, his prodigious labour has proved to be a failure!"

### C. Other External Evidence.

The principal remaining external evidence in which John the Baptist appears is as follows:-

(a) The Hegesippus: a free paraphrase of the Jewish War in Latin entitled De Bello Judaico et excidio urbis Hiersolymitanae.<sup>1</sup> Internal evidence shews that it was not composed before the 4th Century, and that it comes from the hand of a Christian, exhibiting as it does the most remarkable proselytizing tendencies. Critical opinion has assigned it to Ambrose, Bishop of Milan<sup>2</sup> (340-397 A.D.) though Eisler thinks it was composed by a converted Jew named Isaac who latinized his name as Hilarius or Gaudentius.<sup>3</sup>

(b) The Josippon: a free paraphrase or epitome of the Jewish War in Hebrew, drawing largely on the Hegesippus, and existing in seven MSS. and many printed editions. Written in pure Biblical Hebrew, it was composed, so far as can be judged, from the style, the spelling of proper names, and the geographical references, by a Jew living in Southern Italy or on the Illyrian coast of the Adriatic, and may be assigned to the tenth century, although Zeitlin thinks it was completed as early as the sixth.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Eisler: op.cit., p.75, holds that it is a paraphrase of the Halosis, and therefore quotes from it a number of passages (not in the extant Greek Version) as though from the hand of Josephus.
  2. "This is the perfectly credible and unwarrantably disputed witness of the ancient MSS." Niese: E.R.E., vol.vii, p.581b.
  3. Op.cit., p.75.
  4. Jewish Quarterly Review, xxi, 1930, p.416, "My reason for dating the Hebrew Josippon in the 5th or early 6th century is briefly that its author although he made use of the tannaitic literature, did not make use of the amoraic literature which he apparently did not know."



(c) A Rumanian Version of the Jewish War<sup>1</sup> or late origin based partly on the Slavonic Version, and partly on the Acta Pilati<sup>2</sup> and other apocryphal writings. A very short account of the Baptist's activity is given, and his appearance before the Sanhedrin is dismissed in a single sentence.

None of these Versions, Latin, Hebrew, or Rumanian adds materially to other existing evidence relating to the Baptist, and in any case it is clear that their lateness and their apocryphal nature must preclude them from being regarded as trustworthy.

(d) The Ebionite Gospel or the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles, and the Gospel of the Hebrews, the former dating probably from the first half, and the latter from the second half, of the 2nd century,<sup>3</sup> in use among Jewish Christians of Ebionite tendency. Both contain accounts of the baptism of Jesus, and the following statement regarding the Baptist appears in the former:-

'In the days of Herod, King of Judaea, came John baptising

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1. The MS is in the possession of Dr. Gaster (No. 89 of his collection in the British Museum). Cf. Eisler: The Messiah Jesus, Appendix 8, for a table of contents.
  2. Generally agreed to be a spurious 4th century document containing an account of John the Baptist in Hades. Cf. M.R. James: The Apocryphal New Testament, pp. 125ff.
  3. The date of the latter may be roughly fixed by the fact that Eusebius: Hist. Eccles., iii, 39, cf. Loeb Eusebius I, p. 291, speaks of Papias and Ignatius as having known stories contained in the Gospel. The date of the former is indicated by the fact that it was known to Origen and Hegesippus.

..... and all went out to him.'<sup>1</sup>

On the strength of this, Eisler would assign the beginning of John's ministry to the reign of Archelaus, as indicated also by the Slavonic Fragment.<sup>2</sup> There can be little doubt, however, that the Herod referred to here is not Herod the Great, but Herod Antipas, and that the title ascribed to him is simply a loose one for 'tetrarch'.<sup>3</sup>

(e) The Protevangelium Jacobi, an Emesian Vita Johannis, and Apocrypha and Legends concerning Zacharias and John - all purely legendary embroideries of the Gospel narratives and of comparatively late origin. The Protevangelium Jacobi, part of which was composed in the 2nd century, and part in the 4th century, gives an account of the appearance of the angel to Zacharias and of his dumbness, and states that after the birth of John, when Elizabeth heard that Herod's officials sought him, 'she went up into the hill country, and looked about her, where she should hide him, and there was no hiding place, and immediately the mountain clave asunder'.<sup>4</sup> It also records that Zacharias was stabbed to death in the temple by Herod's hired assassins.<sup>5</sup> The Emesian Vita Johannis, like certain other lives of John the Baptist, contains fanciful accounts of

1. James: op.cit., p.9.

2. Op.cit., p.303. Cf. Chapter II.

3. Cf. Mk: 6:14, where Antipas is described as 'King'.

4. Prot.Jac., xxii. Cf. M.R.James: op.cit., pp.48-49.

5. Id., xxiii, xxiv.

the discovery of St. John's head at Emesa in 453 A.D.<sup>1</sup> The Apocrypha and Legends concerning Zacharias and John the Baptist conform in certain points to the Slavonic story of Zacharias, and, for the most part, are obviously little better than pure inventions.<sup>2</sup> These works cannot be seriously regarded as of the slightest value for a study of the historical figure of John the Baptist.

(f) The pseudo-Clementine Recognitions, and the Mandaean literature. As these works will be considered at some length in Chapter IV, treatment of this evidence may best be reserved till that point is reached.

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1. This work may be found in Lives of John the Baptist, Ed. F. Nau, Patrologia Orientalis iv, fasc.5, referred to by James: op.cit., p.xxxi.

2. An interesting statement on the textual history of these writings has been made by Berendts: Die handschriftliche Überlieferung der Zacharias-und-Johannes Apokryphen, Texte der altchristlichen Literatur, New Series, xi, 1904, with references to Berendts: Studien über Zacharias-und-Johannes Apokryphen, Deichert, 1895.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE CHRONOLOGY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

It is now necessary to examine the chronology of John the Baptist according to the Gospels and Josephus in order that the activities of Jesus and John may be viewed in their true perspective. The material falls naturally into three divisions:

- (a) The evidence relating to the birth of John and the commencement of his ministry;
- (b) The question as to whether the ministries of Jesus and John overlapped, with special reference to the Fourth Gospel;
- (c) The evidence relating to the Baptist's death.

(a) The evidence relating to the birth of John and the commencement of his ministry.

The narrative describing the birth of John is peculiar to Luke, and is closely interwoven with his account of the birth of Jesus. The composition of the section is very carefully planned, and appears to be a compact whole, 1:5 - 2:52. Thus in 1 : 5-25, the announcement of John's birth is made by the Angel Gabriel, and in 1 : 26-38, a similar announcement is made of the birth of Jesus. In 1 : 39-56, Elizabeth, the mother of John, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, exchange greetings. In 1 : 57-66, the birth, circumcision, and naming of

John, together with certain accompanying wonders, are related, while in 2: 1-21, a similar account is given of Jesus. In 1 : 67-80, John is extolled by Zacharias, and a note is added on the child's early days, and in 2 : 22-40, a parallel description is given of the extolling of Jesus by Simon and Hannah, together with the identical formula, 'And the child waxed and grew strong in spirit.' Finally in 2 : 41-55, an additional notice appears regarding the early years of Jesus, perhaps with the intention of shewing that he who was Messiah, exhibited, while still a boy, appropriate Messianic characteristics. It is just possible, however, that this last section, 2 : 41-55, emphasizing, as it does, the zeal of Jesus to be about his Father's business, or better, to be in his Father's house (R.V.), and somewhat spoiling the perfect harmony of the structure of the whole passage, is designed to bring out the contrast between Jesus and John, and to establish even at this early stage the inferiority of the latter.<sup>1</sup>

The skill with which the material is arranged suggests that Luke is drawing upon some written source. As W.Manson observes, "As it is not Luke's method in using his sources to supply connectives between events where his authorities do not give them, we infer from his interweaving of the two

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1. Cf. Dibelius: J.d.T., p.68: "Thereby (i.e. by the addition of 2:41-45), the narrative indirectly ascribes to John the inferior position."

narratives, that in the tradition upon which he drew the births of John and Jesus were already associated."<sup>1</sup> A further point in favour of the view that Luke is drawing on a written source and not composing the narratives himself on the basis of oral tradition<sup>2</sup> is the fact that "it is difficult to see how a Gentile Christian like Luke could throw himself back by a supreme effort of the historical imagination to the standpoint of these chapters."<sup>3</sup> Nor can the narratives be regarded as a later insertion because the *ἀνωθεν* of the prologue seems to exclude them. It is true that apostolic tradition regarded the baptism of Jesus by John as the starting-point, Acts 1:21-22, but it did not definitely exclude any material before that. The introduction of John as though for the first time at Lk.3:2 need not be stressed, nor need the appearance of the words, Lucas autem initium fecit a baptismo Johannis, in an additional fragment to two 12th century MSS. of the Armenian Version of Ephraem's commentary on the Diatessaron.<sup>4</sup> The origin of this fragment is quite obscure and in any case there can be no doubt that Ephraem did read Lk. 1 and 2 in his copy of Diatessaron. It seems unlikely, therefore, that the narra-

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1. The Gospel of Luke, p.3.

2. So Harnack: Luke the Physician, Eng.Ed., Appendix II, pp.199-218.

3. Moffatt: Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament, p.267.

4. Moffatt: op.cit., p.272.

tives can be regarded either as a free composition of the Evangelist himself, or as a later addition, and altogether probable that Luke was drawing upon some written record. The style, diction and contents of the narratives would seem to indicate that this written record was a Palestinian Jewish-Christian Aramaic document which Luke has translated and incorporated possibly with certain minor revisions.<sup>1</sup>

If it be assumed, then, that Luke drew upon a written source for the Birth narratives, reference may conveniently be made at this point to the interesting theory of Goguel, viz. that the Evangelist actually used not one, but two written sources in these narratives, one, a distinctively Baptist source embodying material on the Baptist only, the other, Christian, referring to Jesus only.<sup>2</sup> If it could be shown that the Evangelist really used a separate Baptist source, this would very possibly indicate the existence of a Baptist sect or even of a continuing Baptist sect with a literature of their own. In view of the importance of this matter - which will be seen more clearly in Chapter IV - the

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1. The style points unmistakably to an underlying Semitic idiom, and the piety which pervades the whole narrative, together with the definite topographical notes at 1:65, and 2:18, are in favour of this viewpoint.
  2. Op.cit., pp.71-74. This theory, as Goguel points out, is held also by Voelter: Die Apokalypse des Zacharias im Evangelium des Lukas: Theol. Tidjschrift, 1897, pp.244-269, and by Baldensperger: Der Prolog des vierten Evangeliums, sein polemischer-apologetischer Zweck, p.135.

arguments advanced in support of this Two-Source theory must be examined.

The sections in which Goguel suspects the use of a Baptist source are 1:5-25, and 1:57-80. The argument is, that in 1:5-25, there appears a narrative describing the Annunciation to Zacharias of John's birth which could have originated in circles only directly interested in the person of the Baptist. Again, in the same section - the use of the term Kurios makes John the precursor not of Jesus but of God, and is apparently totally different from what one would expect in a distinctively Christian source. Thus in v.16 it is said of the Baptist, 'Many of the children of Israel he shall turn to the Lord their God' and in v.17 it is his function 'to make ready a people prepared for the Lord'. In 1:57-80, the use of a Baptist source is again apparent, Goguel holds: 1:57-66 displays the peculiar interest of John's adherents in his birth and naming; 1:67-75 constitutes a Jewish Messianic psalm containing no allusions to Jesus or his Work or to the Gospel, and 1:76-80 is a Baptist psalm, (which has to be detached from 1:67-75), describing once more the Baptist as the precursor not of Jesus, but of God. Thus in v.76 John is the 'prophet of the Most High' and in v.78 he, not Jesus, is referred to as 'the Dayspring from on high'. The combination of the Jewish psalm and the Baptist psalm,



Goguel concludes, may have been due to a Baptist author who added the Baptist psalm to orientate his own ideas, or to a Baptist redactor who combined the two. At any rate their separate Baptist origin is certain.

This hypothesis is certainly attractive because it is by no means improbable that a certain literature may have grown up around the Baptist as it has done round many historical figures. But, on the other hand, the hypothesis seems to be discountenanced, in the first place, by what has already been said regarding Luke's use of his sources. The Birth-narratives present too great a unity to be attributed to more than one source. Moffatt puts the matter in a nutshell, "It requires arbitrary handling to disentangle from 1:5 - 2:52 .... a Jewish apocalypse of Zacharias."<sup>1</sup> Again, there is nothing in the contents of the passages which definitely forbids their ascription to a Jewish-Christian, as distinct from a Christian source. The use of the term 'Kurios' in 1:16,17 and of the 'prophet of the Most High' in v.76 are reminiscent of the O.T.<sup>2</sup>, and may quite well have been intended to represent John as the precursor of the Messiah, if, as seems very probable, judging from the O.T. flavour of the whole, O.T. terminology was in use in the

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1. Op.cit., p.267.

2. Cf. Ps.47:2, 83:18, 92:8; Is.14:14; Hos.11:7.

Jewish-Christian circles in which the narratives were composed. The expression in v.78, 'The Dayspring from on high hath visited us' may quite naturally refer to Jesus, or rather to the Messianic era, if the narratives were composed after Jesus came to be regarded as Messiah.<sup>1</sup> The composition of vv.76-78 does not definitely forbid a change of subject from John to Jesus in v.78. Finally, it is to be noted particularly that both in 1:5-25, and 1:57-80, the account of the Baptist's activity agrees very well with the Christian interpretation of his significance. Thus v.17, 'He shall go before him in the spirit and in the power of Elias to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just', is parallel to the Baptist's call to repentance, while v.77, where it is prophesied that 'John will give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of sins' is reminiscent of Mk. 1:4, 'preaching a baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins', and of the description of his preaching as 'an evangel', (εὐηγγελίζετο), in Lk.3:18.

The only other section in the Birth-narratives which might indicate the use of a special Baptist source is 1:46-56, the Magnificat. Though commonly ascribed to Mary, there is

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1. The future ἐπισκέψεται, N B Syr.Arm.Goth. Boh. L. is, however, better attested than ἐπεσκέψατο, A C D<sup>min</sup> Lat. Syr<sup>ac</sup> Aeth.

some evidence that it may have originally been uttered by Elizabeth, and if this were so, it may have been drawn from an independent cycle of tradition interested in John. The question has been hotly disputed and no one opinion has held the field.<sup>1</sup> The original text of 1:46 was almost certainly καὶ εἶπε , and the problem is whether Μαρίαμ , or Ἐλισάβετ<sup>2</sup> is the subject. 'Elizabeth' appears in three old Latin MSS,<sup>2</sup> and is vouched for by Niceta of Remesiana as representing an early tradition.<sup>3</sup> Internal evidence seems, if anything, slightly in favour of 'Elizabeth'. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, 1:41, and it is characteristic of Luke to insert εἶπε δὲ or καὶ εἶπε between the speeches of his characters without a change of speaker. Again, in v.56, the expression, 'And Mary remained with her', seems somewhat unnatural if Mary has just been speaking. The text should run, 'And she abode with Elizabeth'. Finally, it is held, the words, 'He hath looked upon the wretched estate of his servant', seem to fit better Elizabeth's joy on being released from a long period of unfruitfulness than Mary's case. None of these arguments, however, can actually be regarded as conclusive. The harmony of the section, 1:34-56, is better

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1. For a bibliography, cf. Moffatt; op.cit., pp.271-272.

2. Codd.Vercellensis, Veronensis, Rehdigeranus.

3. Niceta: De Psalmodiae Bono, 11, "Cum Elizabeth Dominum anima nostra magnificat."

preserved by ascribing the Magnificat to Mary. Elizabeth and Mary alternately claim the attention from 1:23, and 1:45 is a fitting conclusion to Elizabeth's expression of joy at Mary's visit to her. Elizabeth's song of praise is out of place after 1:45, and would more naturally continue after 1:25. The contents of the song - the exaltation of humility, the overthrow of the mighty, the satisfying of hunger - give characteristically no indication of the object of the thanksgiving and could just as well be attributed to Mary as to Elizabeth. The difficulty of v.56, 'And Mary abode with her' can be satisfactorily removed by transferring, as Dibelius suggests,<sup>1</sup> v.56 to follow v.45, which was very probably its original position. Finally, the textual evidence in favour of Mary is stronger than it is for Elizabeth. On the whole, the present writer prefers to ascribe the Magnificat to Mary rather than to Elizabeth, although complete certainty on this point is impossible. It would seem, therefore, that there is not sufficient evidence to support the opinion that the Birth-narratives emanated from two distinct sources, one a Christian, and the other a purely Baptist cycle of tradition.

If then, Luke has used a Palestinian Jewish-Christian Aramaic source for the Birth-narratives, what can be said of

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1. Op.cit., p.73.

the character of this source, and how far may it be trusted for chronological information regarding John the Baptist? It can scarcely be doubted that the narratives in question contain a large amount of purely legendary material. They are poetry, and the pious imagination of the poet has woven round his heroes certain mysterious and wonderful details. Characteristic of legendary composition is the announcement of the hero's birth by heavenly messengers. The O.T. furnishes excellent parallels. God announces a wondrous lineage to Abram<sup>1</sup>; an angel prophesies the birth of Manoah<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, the angel Gabriel appears to Zacharias and Mary. Characteristic, too, of hero literature is the long unfruitfulness of the mother<sup>3</sup> which was regarded as a reproach. The removal of this reproach by God indicated that the child would stand in especial favour with God, and be of consequence in the world. Further, the dumbness attributed to Zacharias is a constantly recurring mythical trait<sup>4</sup> while the wondrous happenings immediately preceding the birth of the child, 1:44ff., and attendant also on his naming, 1:60-63, point in the same direction. It is clear that these highly poetic narratives cannot be regarded as history in the strict

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1. Gen. 15:5.

2. Judges, 13:3.

3. I.Sam.1:1-23.

4. Compare the blinding of Teiresias, (Apollodor., III.6.7.), cited by Dibelius: op.cit., p.72, note 1.

sense of the word. To regard them as such is to do injustice to their literary form. History has been clothed with imaginary details of the pious fancy, and it is only with the utmost caution that the narratives can be used for establishing chronological data.

The information supplied regarding the Baptist's birth is contained in Lk.1:5, and 1:36. In 1:5 we are introduced to the parents of John, Zacharias, a priest of the course of Abia, and Elizabeth. In 1:36 we are given to understand that John was six months older than Jesus. Since both these data have been extensively used to establish the date of John's birth, and since deductions have been drawn from them as to the time of the beginning of his ministry, their claims to trustworthiness must be investigated.

There are no valid reasons for doubting the statement that John was of priestly descent. His father, Zacharias, was probably an ordinary priest and not high-priest. At any rate, the name Zacharias is not included in the list of high-priests between 25 B.C. and 5 B.C. which Josephus drew up apparently with some care.<sup>1</sup> He is called simply ἱερεὺς by Luke, and the facts that he offered incense by lot, a function which the high-priest reserved for himself at

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1. From 24 B.C. the names are Simon, Boethus, Matthias, Joseph and Jossar. Cf. Schürer; op.cit., II, vol.i, pp.197-198, with references to Josephus.

pleasure, and after his term of office returned to his home 'in a city of Judah .... in the hill country',<sup>1</sup> whereas the high-priest resided in Jerusalem, suggest the same conclusion. Brandt thinks it strange that Josephus says nothing of John's priestly connexions. He feels that Josephus would not have failed to mention the fact, because the historian himself shews great pride in his own priestly descent. This argumentum e silentio is strengthened, he believes, by the consideration that no priest would have baptised in the Jordan, the water of which was regarded as unfit for religious lustrations.<sup>2</sup> The silence of Josephus need not, however, be stressed, in view of the terseness of his notice regarding the Baptist, while the second objection may be met by the reflection that the water of Jordan may well have been regarded as holy in view of Ezekiel 47, and thereby suitable for lustrations. It may have been, however, that John deliberately rejected the priestly tabu and in so doing displayed a daring originality in a ceremony overladen with cramping restrictions. In any case, Brandt's objections do not appear to be wholly decisive. The fact that priests were sent to examine John<sup>3</sup> suggests that these were the people who would be best calculated to understand him, and Luke may be even underlining John's priestly

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1. Lk. 1:39.

2. Die jüdischen Baptismen, p.79.

3. Jn. 1:19.

parentage to shew that at last a prophet appeared among the priests.<sup>1</sup> The evidence is too slender to be quite definite, however, but it may be safely said that none of the known facts of the life of John contradicts the view that the Baptist was of priestly descent.

If, then, as seems not improbable, John was of priestly descent, is it possible to date his birth from this fact? Scaliger believed that it was, and since the opinions expressed in his erudite work De Emendatione Temporum have been upheld by many other scholars,<sup>2</sup> it may be advisable to give the gist of the argument. Zacharias belonged to the priestly class of Abia or **A**bijah, the eighth in the list of the twenty-four classes into which David divided the priestly body, each class holding office in turn.<sup>3</sup> After the exile only four of the twenty-four classes returned from Babylonia, the classes of Jedaia, Harim, Pheshur, and Emmer, and these four were again sub-divided into twenty-four by Ezra and took the names of the original Davidic divisions.<sup>4</sup> In the year 70 A.D. on the 9th August the class of Jehojarib was in

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1. E.F.Scott: The Kingdom and the Messiah, p.77, "We have no fair reason for doubting the tradition that John was descended from a priestly family: but the bare fact is elaborated by Luke with a purpose that can hardly be other than symbolical. A prophet arose among the priests. The placid routine of the conventional religion ..... was suddenly interrupted."
  2. Notably by F.R.Montgomery Hitchcock: Dict.of Christ and the Gospels, vol.i, p.410.
  3. 1.Chron. 24.
  4. Josephus: Antiq. vii.14.7.(363ff.).



office. So, for Scaliger and his followers, it is only a question of an arithmetical calculation to determine at what time the family of Abia was in office. He believes that it is possible to fix the week 3-9 Oct., 6 B.C. as such a period. Now if the Annunciation to Zacharias took place in Oct. 6 B.C. and the pregnancy of Elizabeth began at that time, the date of John's birth would fall roughly about July 5 B.C. and that of Jesus, who, we are told, was six months younger, in December of the same year. This theory of Scaliger's is open to a three-fold objection. First, it is by no means certain that the class of Jehoharib was in office on 9 Aug. 70, the date of the destruction of the Temple. As Buxy puts it, "It is at the very least curious that the class of Jehoharib, which is alleged to have been serving in the Temple on the day of the Temple's destruction, was also according to Rabbinical authority performing its office at the time of the first destruction of the temple by Nabuchodonosor. One may very well ask whether this is a mere coincidence or whether it is not rather the result of some attempt at systematic harmonisation."<sup>1</sup> Second, the theory assumes that Jesus was born in 5 B.C., and on the strength of this, the week 3-9 October in the year 6 B.C. is selected as the period of office of Zachariah. But surely the date of the birth of

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1. The Life of St. John the Baptist, English Ed., p.26.

Jesus is one of the most uncertain and highly debated points of N.T. chronology, so that it is quite gratuitous to assume that the year 5 B.C. was the year in question and hence to work out the Baptist's date of birth as falling in the same year. There is an "inquiétante naïveté"<sup>1</sup> about this method of calculation which makes it quite improbable if not entirely inadmissible. Third, even though it were granted that Jesus was born in 5 B.C., the theory would hold good only if the date of Jesus' birth fell in December of that year, and if we could trust the statement that John was exactly six months older than Jesus. As for the former point, it has to be borne in mind that Christmas was celebrated for the first time in Rome on 25th December in the year 354 A.D. by Pope Liberius, and as Goguel says, "If this date was adopted as the date of the birth of Jesus, it was not because of their being any certainty of its being based upon a tradition relating to the birth of Jesus, but solely from the desire to transform to the advantage of a Christian festival the custom of the celebration on the 25th December of the Natalis Solis Invicti".<sup>2</sup> Moreover the account in Lk.2:8 that the shepherds were watching their flocks in the fields does not suggest the winter season, but more possibly the late summer or autumn, the usual time for doing so. As for

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1. Buzy: op.cit., French Ed., p.29.

2. Op.cit., pp.278-279.

the latter point, viz. that John was six months older than Jesus, it is scarcely likely that this rests on good tradition. It is part and parcel of the poetical imagination which wove together these narratives, and is very probably inspired by astral calculations which are a constantly recurring feature of this particular type of literary work. The six months would then refer to the divisions of the Sun-Year, and the birth of John would fall in the period of the Sun's decline, and that of Jesus at the moment when the sun began to grow stronger and the day to lengthen.<sup>1</sup> It is just possible that this symbolism may have been intended to stress the inferiority of John, and to shew that his ministry was of no great duration or consequence, as compared with that of Jesus. There seems to be a distinct echo of this astrological terminology in Jn.3:30, 'He must increase, but I must decrease'. In the case of the Birth-Narratives, however, it is unnecessary, perhaps, to look beyond the poetic nature of the composition for an explanation of the formula.

So far then, as the Birth-Narratives are concerned, it appears that the chronological data which they contain re-

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1. Cf. Dibelius: op.cit., p.75, "On the two halves of the Sun-Year, stands the One (Jesus), in the sign of the Increase, the other (John), in the sign of the decrease of the day."

garding the Baptist's birth can scarcely be seriously considered. Just as the pious imagination, in the case of Jesus, wove round his Birth "intuitive conclusions from the transcendant nature and destiny of One who had been received in the Church as the Son of God and of the nature of God",<sup>1</sup> so, in the case of John the intuitive conclusions have been extended to cover in a measure the forerunner, and can even represent a Galilean and a Judaeon, the respective parents, as cousins! Exquisite as the narratives are, they can scarcely be treated as history. What is tolerably certain, nevertheless, is that John the Baptist was of priestly descent, the son of Zacharias and Elizabeth; beyond this, however, it is unsafe to go.

Consideration may now be given to other chronological notes on which, perhaps, more reliance may be placed. The most definite appears at Lk.3:1, 'Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea, and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high-priests, the word of God came unto John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.'<sup>2</sup> Un-

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1. W.Manson: Gospel of Luke, p.278.

2. Pontius Pilate: 26-36 A.D.; Herod 4-34 A.D.; Philip 4-39 A.D.; Caiaphas 17-35 or 36 A.D..

fortunately, the 15th year of Tiberius is a date which is keenly disputed, and four methods of calculations are suggested. (a) The dynastic method, according to which Luke would be reckoning from the time of the death of Augustus, 19 Aug., 14 A.D., and the 15th year would be that which began on 19th Aug., 28 A.D.. Ramsay, however, has admirably shown that this was not the usual method of calculation in ancient times, and that it was adopted only for simplicity's sake by later historians.<sup>1</sup> (b) The Roman official method, according to which the years were reckoned from the day of the Emperor's assumption of the 'tribunicia potestas'. It is scarcely likely, however, that this method would have been employed by Luke, especially as the 'tribunicia potestas' of Tiberius was interrupted for a considerable period. (c) The method of dating the Emperor's reign from the point at which he was associated in office with his predecessor. Tiberius was associated with Augustus in 12 A.D. and the 15th year in this case would be 26 A.D.. But this method was adopted only in special circumstances, and it is not altogether probable that the Evangelist would have employed it. (d) The method of calculation according to the local provincial years. On this Ramsay writes, "In Asia Minor and North Syria a year beginning at the autumn equinox was very widely used. It might, with very great

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1. Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible, V, pp.479ff.

probability, be argued that men like St. Luke and St. Paul, brought up in lands where a year of that kind was certainly or probably in ordinary use, would naturally count according to it. That must be admitted as reasonable; and there seems to be no weighty consideration against it."<sup>1</sup> If this were so, the first year of Tiberius would be 19th Aug. - 22nd Sept. 14 A.D. and the 15th year that commencing on 22nd Sept., 27 A.D..

Important as it is to fix this date with precision, it is of still greater importance to determine just what Luke wished to indicate by his elaborate chronological statement. It is practically universally held that it was intended to mark the withdrawal of John from his solitude in the desert, and the beginning of his active ministry. Colour is given to this opinion by Lk.3:2, (at that time) ..... 'The word of God came to John in the desert'. Despite this, however, it is not impossible that Luke's real intention here was not to set forth so elaborately the date of the commencement of John's ministry, but to fix precisely the date of the baptism of Jesus. This is the real climax to which his narrative leads up, and the activity of the Baptist is introduced merely as a prelude to the great event. The Evangelist was not particularly interested in the Baptist

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1. Op.cit., p.483b.

as an independent figure, but only in so far as he was of significance for the life of Jesus. This has already been noticed in the constant interweaving of the two personalities in the Birth-Narratives. Unless, then, the commencement of John's ministry and the baptism of Jesus took place at the same time - a view which is discredited by several considerations - the more natural conclusion would seem to be that the Evangelist was dating here not the beginning of John's activity, but the year of the baptism of Jesus.

That the commencement of John's ministry and the baptism of Jesus were not concurrent events, and that they have been run together by the Evangelist probably from a desire to have done with the account of the Forerunner, and to proceed with his central theme, is suggested by the following considerations. First, it is extremely unlikely that Jesus would have accepted baptism so quickly from one whose tenets he had not first carefully weighed and examined. The impression conveyed by his estimate of John, together with the very definite traces of the teaching of the Forerunner in that of Jesus suggest a much longer period of contact than the Evangelists admit. The baptism of Jesus was the culminating point of this period of contact, and not simply a chance meeting or even one of

brief duration.<sup>1</sup> Second, the peculiar emphasis on the crowds of people who flocked to hear John would indicate that his activity was not a short and passing phenomenon, but of sufficient length and importance for news of it to spread throughout 'the whole of Judea, Jerusalem, and the district of Jordan'.<sup>2</sup> Even Herod had become alarmed at its magnitude and its possible repercussions. Third, there is some textual evidence pointing to a period of independent activity longer than would at first sight appear. It is to be observed that Mark, in his account of the Baptist, 1:1-8, seems to identify the Wilderness<sup>3</sup> and the district of the River Jordan. Luke draws a sharp distinction between the Wilderness and the Jordan district, Lk.3:2 and 3:3, and the same may be said, though to a lesser extent, of Matthew, Matt.3:1 and 3:6. All three Evangelists state that after the baptism, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness which seems rather strange if the district of Jordan were regarded as part of the Wilderness. Blakiston<sup>4</sup> points out that at 3:1 Matthew employs the word κηρὺς ὁ ἄγριος

1. See especially Chapter VI.                      2. Mk.1:4.
3. For a description of the Wilderness of Judea, see Hasting's Dict. of Christ and the Gospels, vol.ii, pp.822-823. The exact identification of it is uncertain. It is not to be conceived of as a barren tract of sand, but as a wild waste-land broken here and there by shrubs and trees. The Jordan valley, however, was fertile, abounding in prolific vegetation and shaded by palms.
4. John the Baptist and His Relations to Jesus, p.203.



(preaching), and not βαπτίζων (baptising) and thinks that the actual baptising commenced only with the appearance of John on the banks of the Jordan. Again, the words of Luke at 3:2, 'And John came into all the district of Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance' suggest an itinerant ministry. John preached on the way, seeking out a suitable place for introducing his baptismal rite. Great crowds followed him, and his popularity which was already great, was immeasurably increased by the commencement of the baptism itself. No great stress can be laid upon Lk.1:80, 'John was in the desert places' (the plural is significant!) 'till the day of his manifestation to Israel.' The lonely prophet in the desert places is just the theme for poetical fancy and was more probably inspired by this than based on accurate tradition.<sup>1</sup> As for the opening verses of the Gospel of Mark, it is acknowledged that these present a difficult exegetical problem. What is of importance here is the meaning of ἐγένετο in v.4, and the significance of v.1 and its connection, if any, with what follows. If v.1 is connected directly with v.4, the translation would be: 'The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (the son of God) .... was (ἐγένετο) John who baptized in the wilderness.' Rawlinson takes this view<sup>2</sup> and, in certain respects, it is attrac-

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1. Cf. Dibelius: op.cit., p.77.

2. Gospel of Mark, p.6.

tive. Thus in early Christian circles the question may have been asked: How did the Gospel begin? Mark, following perhaps the reminiscences of Peter, who significantly starts the Gospel at the same point, provides the answer by stating that it began with Jesus' association with John. But v.1 may equally well, if not better, be regarded as a superscription or title for the Gospel as a whole. Thus, the life of Jesus was only 'the beginning of the Gospel', Acts 1:1, Heb.2:3, and 'the end is not yet', Mk.13:7. The history of the Church is the real sequel to the Gospel history. As Wellhausen puts it, quoted by Rawlinson,<sup>1</sup> "Jesus cannot be understood in abstraction from his influence in history, and if he is cut off from this he is robbed of his main significance." Stylistic considerations, too, turn the scale in favour of this view. Mark's style is characterised by a roughness of construction of which a polished opening sentence, such as is produced by running together vv. 1 and 4, is by no means typical. The absence of the article before ἀρχή, Χριστοῦ, υἱοῦ, Θεοῦ is also worth observing, as this is the normal practice in titles of books (e.g. James 1:1). On the whole, therefore, it is preferable, perhaps, to make a fresh start at v.4, and to assume that the real beginning of the Gospel has been lost. If v.2 which is to

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1. Op.cit., p.250.

be regarded as a later insertion by a copyist<sup>1</sup> is omitted, and if ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ is taken closely with ἐγένετο in v.4, the translation would run, 'John did appear in the wilderness, he who baptised and preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.'<sup>2</sup> If this exegesis is justified, as perhaps it is, in view of the support it gains from Matthew and Luke, the apparent identification in Mark of the Wilderness and the Jordan district vanishes, and Mark is now in substantial agreement with Matthew and Luke, viz., that John began his activity in the Wilderness and that at some period subsequent to this he preached and baptised on the banks of the Jordan. If this is so, it will be to this phase of John's ministry to which the question of Jesus, 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see?'<sup>3</sup> refers.

That the Synoptists and in particular Mark have shortened John's ministry, yet not so successfully as to remove all traces of a longer period of independent activity, and that the Synoptists probably knew more about these earlier stages than they cared to tell, is the impression which an analysis of the facts affords.

If, then, as seems highly probable, the elaborate

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1. Cf. Chapter VI, (c), p.383.
  2. Reading καὶ κηρύσσων. Although the majority of texts have κηρύσσων alone, καὶ κηρύσσων is probably correct. Cf. Ency. Biblica, vol.ii, col.2499, (note 1). Cf. Blakiston: op.cit., p.203
  3. Matt.11:7. Cf. Blakiston: op.cit., p.88.

chronology of Luke is meant to mark the year of the baptism of Jesus, is it possible to determine how long before this time John had begun his own ministry? There are two indications which may be of value towards arriving at a decision. The first appears at Matt. 3:1, 'In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea.' To what period do the words, 'in those days', refer? Eisler<sup>1</sup> holds that the reference must be to the period immediately subsequent to the death of Herod in 4 B.C., mentioned in the previous chapter, 2:19-22. He contends that adequate support is given to this view by the Ebionite Gospel, and would place the opening of John's ministry before the beginning of the Christian era. "He must then have been an old man in the time of Jesus between fifty-five and sixty-five years of age as he is, in fact, generally represented in early Christian art."<sup>2</sup> Attractive as this view is, it does not seem to be the correct one. The nature of the Ebionite Gospel has already been examined, and it has been made clear that the 'Herod' referred to there was probably not Herod the Great, but Herod Antipas, the tetrarch. As for the words, 'in those days', it is more natural to take them closely with 2:23, 'And Joseph came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth .... in those days came John.' The

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1. Revue Archéologique, xxxii, 1930, pp.116-126.

2. Eisler: The Messiah Jesus, p.244.

period indicated would then be some point of time during the residence of Josephus in Nazareth, which extended over many years, and not necessarily, as Eisler would have us believe, the years immediately following upon Herod's death in 4 B.C.

It might appear, however, that Eisler's thesis that John was twenty or thirty years older than Jesus, and that his activity had already started before the Christian era, gains some support from Lk. 1:80, and 2:1. In 1:80, Luke states that 'the child (John) grew and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.' At 2:1 the Evangelist writes, 'In those days ..... Mary brought forth her first-born son'. If there is a real connexion between these two verses, it would be necessary to believe that the Baptist was in reality about thirty years older than Jesus, and that his ministry commenced prior to or shortly after the latter's birth. But apart from the dubious nature of the statement that 'John was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel', which, as already shown, is probably the product of poetic fancy rather than based on good tradition, it does not seem likely that there is any real connexion intended in any case between the two verses, at least, from a chronological point of view. The plural, 'those days'

2:1, following upon the singular, 'the day', 1:80, does not suggest that the two periods of time were really concurrent, and as Goguel observes, "the scene of the Annunciation would lose all its significance if it took place twenty years before the birth of Jesus was announced to Mary."<sup>1</sup> We have here the interweaving of the Birth-Narratives of forerunner and Master. The poet who composed them can scarcely have intended by Lk. 1:80, and 2:1, that a gap of twenty years or more separated the births of John and Jesus.

The second indication regarding the period of the opening of the Baptist's ministry is given, though indirectly, in Lk. 1:5, 'There was in the days of Herod, the King of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, etc.' This verse quite definitely places the birth of John at some point during the reign of Herod the Great, although, here again, Eisler disagrees with this view and writes, "In my opinion it is quite unnecessary to interpret the passage Lk.1:5 .... as if the author meant that Elizabeth's pregnancy and the birth of the Baptist narrated in the sequel fell within the reign of Herod the Great. ἐγένετο has its usual sense 'flourished', lived in the days of Herod the Great, and, 1:7, when he and his wife were now well advanced in years,

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1. Jean-Baptiste, p.280.

toward the end of their lives, they, through God's mercy, had a son."<sup>1</sup> He thinks that the correct date of the birth of Jesus was 6 or 7 A.D., the year of the well-known census of Cyrenius, Lk.2:2, and that Luke has erroneously placed the Baptist's birth in the same year. In reply to this, it may be said that Lk. 1:5 can be properly understood only as implying that John was actually born during the reign of Herod the Great, and as for the census of Cyrenius in 6 or 7 A.D., "we now know that there was a census in 8 or 7 B.C. when Cyrenius was military governor and waging war against the Homonadenses in Syria, Saturninus being the ordinary civil ruler."<sup>2</sup> If this is so, and there are at least tolerably good grounds for the statement, the conclusion may be drawn that John was born towards the end of the reign of Herod the Great, and if it be assumed, as is perfectly natural, that he was about thirty when he started his activity, it is possible to arrive fairly accurately at the date of the commencement of his independent ministry.

Thus far, then, the chronological data may be arranged as follows:-

- (a) The baptism of Jesus took place in the autumn of 27 A.D., and the activity of John the Baptist had started some time previous to this.  
Lk.3:1; Mk.1:4; Matt.3:1; Lk.3:3.

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1. The Messiah Jesus, p.292.  
2. Jack: The Historic Christ, p.242. Cf. Matt.2:1, and Tertullian: adv. Marcionem, 4:19, "Sed et census constat actos sub Augusto nunc in Iudaea per Sentium Saturninum."

- (b) John was born during the reign of Herod the Great. Lk.1:5-7.
- (c) John's activity had not commenced as early as 4 B.C.. Matt.2:23, 3:1.
- (d) John was not twenty to thirty years old when Jesus was born. Lk.1:80, 2:1.

The impression derived from these data is that John was born about 8 B.C., and that he commenced his ministry about 22 A.D., when 30 years old, though he may have done so even earlier. Between 22 A.D. and 27 A.D. news of his preaching came to Jesus and at some point in this period Jesus went to John, and spent in his company a very considerable time. This contact culminated in the baptism of Jesus in 27 A.D.. It is impossible, however, to be anything like dogmatic on the chronology in question. The most valuable point, and one which will be strengthened in the course of this thesis, is the long period both of John's own ministry, and of the association of Jesus with him. The short way in which the Evangelists refer to this period may perhaps exhibit what Bacon has described as the "obvious reluctance of our Gospel sources to allow Jesus to appear in any way dependent upon John, a determination on their part to regard all John's activity as proleptic, a prophet's pointing forward to what should come after", or, in other words, as the attempt of Christian tradition to show "a progressive magnification



of everything that could set John forth in the subordinate relation of herald and forerunner of the Gospel with the progressive minimising of all that might allow to his reformatory movement independent value."<sup>1</sup>

(b) The Question as to whether the ministries of Jesus and John overlapped, with special reference to the Fourth Gospel.

In this section one of the most interesting and important points in the chronologies of John and Jesus is reached - a point which must be investigated in some detail because on it hangs to a considerable extent the perspective in which the ministries of John and Jesus should be envisaged.

According to the Synoptics the arrest of John by Herod followed immediately or very shortly after the Baptism of Jesus, and it was only after John's arrest that the ministry of Jesus opened. Thus Mark states, 'Now after that John had been put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel.'<sup>2</sup> Similarly Matthew, 'Now when Jesus heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee....'

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1. Journal of Biblical Literature, vol.xlviii, 1929, pp.44-45.

2. Mk.1:14. παράδοσθαι = "to be handed over", hence, with the additional thought of being "delivered up" into prison. This is the most natural interpretation of the verb, and it is well supported by its use in other contexts. Cf. M and M: Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament, p.483. It is also supported by Matt.11:2, ἐν τῷ δεσμοῦ τῆς φυλῆς, which, despite its absence from the Lucan parallel, 7:18, can scarcely be satisfactorily regarded as an unauthorised editorial time-comment. Cf. W.F.Howard: Amicitiae Corolla, 1933, pp.118-124.

from that time Jesus began to preach.'<sup>1</sup> Luke is so anxious to establish this fact that the account of John's arrest appears in his Gospel even before the baptism of Jesus. 'Herod added yet this above all that he shut up John in prison.'<sup>2</sup> According to the Fourth Gospel, John's arrest did not follow immediately after the baptism of Jesus. After the baptism there followed (a) a period in which the disciples of the Baptist are represented as passing over to Jesus. This took place not in Galilee, but in Perea. 'Again the next day after John stood and two of his disciples, and looking upon Jesus as he walked said, Behold the Lamb of God. And the two disciples heard him speak and they followed Jesus.'<sup>3</sup> (b) a period in which the ministries of Jesus and John definitely overlapped. 'After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea, and there he tarried with them and baptised. And John also was baptising at Aenon near to Salim for there was much water there: and they came and were baptised. For John was not yet cast into prison.'<sup>4</sup> The definite way in which this statement is made indicates that the Fourth Evangelist is aware that he is contradicting the Synoptic tradition. This tradition must have been well established

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1. Matt. 4:12, 17.  
3. Jn. 1:35-37.

2. Lk. 3:18-20.  
4. Jn. 3:22-24.

else the Fourth Evangelist would not have been at such pains to assert that the ministries of Jesus and John did overlap, and that 'John was not yet cast into prison'.

In view of this discrepancy between the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel, attempts have been made to harmonise them by supposing, in the first instance, that the Fourth Evangelist is referring to a call of the disciples before the beginning of the Synoptic narrative. It is true that Mk.1:16 seems to imply that Jesus had known Simon and Andrew for some time previous to their formal call. On the other hand, John's use of the formula, 'Follow me', and the fact that no mention is made of any other call in subsequent chapters, point to the conclusion that the Fourth Evangelist is describing here the formal call, and not referring to any period of acquaintance of Jesus with his disciples prior to the opening of the Synoptics. The apparent strangeness of the expression at Mk.1:18 is relieved, perhaps, by the reflection that the account of the call is given very shortly and concisely, because the Evangelist desired to get over these preliminaries as quickly as possible and to proceed with his account of the Good News. It may be assumed - and, as will be seen, there are good grounds for the assumption - that Jesus had known those who were later to become his disciples for a considerable period anterior to their formal

call. The Synoptists and the Fourth Evangelist, then, are referring to the same event, and the discrepancy remains.

To determine which viewpoint is correct is not easy. It should be remembered that the weight of evidence is not strictly three, (Matt.Mk.Lk.) to one, (Jn.). If Mark had the statement that the ministries did not overlap, the probability that Matthew and Luke simply repeated this opinion must be seriously reckoned with. But it may be asked: Does this seem a very natural point to assert so definitely unless it were based on good tradition? It seems to be scarcely so, although it is possible that the Synoptists have made this chronological note proleptically in order to exclude the idea that the Baptist's work lasted for any extent of time, and had any independent significance. To be quite fair, the evidence may be taken as evenly balanced, and the choice therefore lies between the Synoptists and the Fourth Evangelist. This involves an inquiry into the historical value of the Fourth Gospel, an inquiry, which in compass of the present work cannot be exhaustive, but embracing the salient points only.

The most diverse opinions have been held regarding the historical value of the Fourth Gospel. Radical criticism has declared it to be historically utterly unreliable: con-

servative scholars have stressed its accurate historical basis on which a vast superstructure of theological teaching has been built up. The present writer regards this superstructure of theological teaching as the most important, if not, the all-controlling motive which inspired the Evangelist to write this Gospel, and believes that this didactic desire has in many cases coloured the facts of history, and altered and modified them to provide suitable settings in which to bring home the teaching intended. The Evangelist was not primarily interested in giving concise and chronological historical facts. His was a 'spiritual Gospel' and it is from this standpoint that it should be interpreted. It is in fact a kind of sermon "which reminds us of the later Jewish homiletic method known as Haggada in which religious teaching is driven home by the allegorising of sacred history."<sup>1</sup>

The text of the sermon is, 'That you may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing may have life through his name.'<sup>2</sup> It is true that these words set forth the programme not merely of the Fourth Evangelist but also of the Synoptists, but whereas the Synoptists expound the text by direct narration of the words and acts of Jesus, the Fourth Evangelist does so rather by allowing the words

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1. G.H.C.Macgregor: The Gospel of John, p.xxi.

2. Jn. 20:31.

and acts to remain solely as a background providing an admirable setting for his own reflections about Jesus, which in an extremely beautiful way bring home the conclusion that Jesus is the Son of God. "Indeed so little careful is the author to distinguish between his own thoughts and those which he puts into the mouths of his characters that it is sometimes impossible to tell where the speech which he is reporting ends and his own comment upon it begins."<sup>1</sup> These didactic personal reflections constitute the principal element in the Gospel to which all else - speakers, dialogue, setting - are subordinate. The miracles, too, are introduced as 'signs' to shew that Jesus is the Son of God and 'to display his glory'.<sup>2</sup>

The Fourth Evangelist pre-supposes on the part of his readers an intimate knowledge of the facts of the beginning of Christianity. As Dibelius writes, "The Gospel of John is a Book for people who knew. Personalities and situations bearing upon the history of Jesus are frequently introduced, but for all that the Fourth Evangelist tells us, the questions might be asked: Who was John the Baptist?

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1. Macgregor: op.cit., p.xxiv. Excellent parallels, as noted here, are to be found in the practice of Thucydides and Plato who report not the ipsissima verba of their speakers, but intermingle their own reflections, theories and philosophies.
  2. Jn.2:11. The Synoptics, on the other hand, make faith a condition of miracles.

When did the events narrated at 1:32 take place? .... What were the 'signs' mentioned in 2:23? ..... The Evangelist does not say."<sup>1</sup> Clearly he presupposes on the part of his readers the knowledge of Mark, and possibly also of Luke, which he, himself, had. As Bernard observes, "The words of Mark were adopted in many cases both by Luke and Matthew, sometimes without change and sometimes with corrections, which, in the judgment of the later evangelists improved the style or made for accuracy. It is possible that John may have used the Synoptics in like manner. It would have been quite consistent with the literary habits of the time if he occasionally borrowed a sentence from his predecessors. There will, then, be nothing to surprise us if we find in John not only traditions which he shared with earlier evangelists, as well as with the whole Church of his day, but also traces of the actual incorporation in his text of descriptive phrases from the Synoptic Gospels, or from their sources."<sup>2</sup> But this by no means covers all the cases. The fact is, that it was not the events nor the sequence of events in which this writer was primarily interested, but in their inner meaning and in their deeper significance as showing that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. The events themselves formed part of the great array of witnesses massed together by our author in testimony to this

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1. Op.cit., p.101.

2. St.John, I.C.C., pp.xcv-xcvi.

supreme truth.

It is as a witness that John the Baptist is introduced in this Gospel. The key-note is already struck in the Prologue, 'There was a man sent from God whose name was John. The same came for a witness to bear witness of the Light that all men through him might believe.' This is repeated at 1:8,15,31,34; 2:26,28; 5:32,33; and so pre-occupied is the Evangelist with this idea that the impression he conveys is that John was no more than a witness. No mention is made of any independent ministry and teaching of the Baptist. "In place of the powerful personality .... whom we have in the Synoptics, we find in the Fourth Gospel no more than a subsidiary figure introduced to make known the majesty of Jesus - a figure endowed with supernatural knowledge, but monotonous, always the same, and historically without the slightest colour."<sup>1</sup> It seems that the tendency, already suspected in the Synoptics, to integrate the Baptist in the evangelical history, and to minimise his own peculiar role, is here in the Fourth Gospel pushed to its extreme.

No better illustration of this tendency can be found than in the placing of Jesus and John side by side as is done in the section 3:22ff. Jesus and John and their disciples are represented as baptising in the same neighbourhood. A dispute arises on some point concerning purifica-

1. Schmiedel: Ency.Bib., vol.ii, col.2519A. (slightly altered).



tion between John's disciples and the disciples of Jesus<sup>1</sup> - a dispute which possibly originated in a difference of opinion between Jesus himself and John himself on this practice. Already at 3:26 the superiority of Jesus to John is subtly hinted at in the words, 'All men come to him'. The stage is now set for an exposition in which the Baptist assumes his regular role of witness and forerunner. 'He must increase, but I must decrease', v.30, is the theme around which the Evangelist weaves his own reflections. It is impossible to tell where the words of the Baptist end and those of the Evangelist begin, but it seems almost certain that vv.31-36 belong to another context, and should follow either 3:21, as Bernard suggests,<sup>2</sup> or 3:13, as Macgregor proposes.<sup>3</sup> The historical nucleus of the passage reduces itself, then, to the "question" or "dispute about

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1. This interpretation is based upon Bentley and Semler's conjecture, viz., that *μετὰ (τῶν) Ἰησοῦ* has been corrupted to *μετὰ Ἰουδαίου*. The reading of *ⲙⲉⲧⲁ ⲛⲓⲙⲉⲛⲓⲛ* fam.13, the Latin vss., and Syr.cu. is *Ἰουδαίων*, but *Ἰουδαίου*, *ⲙⲉⲧⲁ ⲛⲓⲙⲉⲛⲓⲛ* is almost equally well attested. At any rate, some confusion in the text is apparent. Neither *Ἰουδαίου* nor *Ἰουδαίων* seem to make the best possible sense in the context. It is unusual, as Loisy points out, to refer to the adherents of Jesus as "Jews", without any other designation, and the narrative does appear to imply that the disputants were extolling the merits of Jesus' baptism, as contrasted with John's, a contingency, which, in itself, is most improbable. *μετὰ (τῶν) Ἰησοῦ* on the other hand, gives admirable point to the whole incident, but, at the same time, embodies a tradition, which, at an early date, it was felt desirable to obliterate. *μετὰ (τῶν) Ἰησοῦ*, cf. O.Holtzmann: *Das Johannes-Evangelium*, 21, could quite easily be made into *μετὰ Ἰουδαίου*; cf. Baldensperger: *op.cit.*, p.66; Loisy: *Le Quatrième Évangile*, p.336.
2. *Op.cit.*, p.xxiii.      3. *Op.cit.*, pp.77, 85.

purification". There is reason to believe that this is based on good tradition, as it is difficult, if not impossible, to see how it could have been invented, but the setting and the dénouement are stage-managed to bring out John's testimony to Jesus against a background of historical verisimilitude. As Dibelius puts it, "Just as the author of 'Mary Stewart' brings together in Fotheringay Park the two Queens, who never saw each other, for the sake of contrasting them, similarly the Fourth Evangelist places John and Jesus together at the same work and at the same time: he wishes to shew by this that the full Sunshine has extinguished the light of the moon, and that the work of the Baptist is done: his joy is complete, he can step down from the stage: in the rest of the Gospel he is merely one who 'has been'."¹

In support of the contention that the overlapping of the ministries is unhistorical, and that the section just discussed is in reality a *mise en scène*, it may be observed how contradictory and conflicting is the evidence of the Fourth Gospel on the relations of John and Jesus. We are told that John recognised Jesus as Messiah (1:29), and that the whole point of his baptising was to prepare the people for his coming (1:23). If this were so, why does John continue to baptise side by side with Jesus? (3:22). Why

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1. J.d.T., p.111.

do John's disciples require to underline the success of one whom John himself openly avowed to be Messiah (3:26)? Jesus has more disciples than John (3:26, 4:1) but no one receives his witness (3:32)! Finally, Jesus is represented as baptising (3:22), and as not baptising (4:2).<sup>1</sup> It would be precarious to attempt to explain away all these inconsistencies as due to clumsiness of redaction. To the redactor, however, certainly some of them may be due. More likely they are to be explained as arising "through the utilisation of a source which the Evangelist has modified and surcharged to adapt it to his own ideas."<sup>2</sup> To determine what stood in that source originally is by no means simple.<sup>3</sup> The best way to do so may be to delete what probably did not. Clearly the words, 'For John was not yet cast into prison' did not. (3:24). This has all the appearance of a chronological note of the Evangelist himself in his anxiety to excuse himself from differing with established tradition. Nor did the statement in v.26, 'He who was with you beyond Jordan, and

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1. The contradiction between these two verses can scarcely be regarded as more apparent than real. Paul, it might be argued, rarely baptised in person, but authorised others to baptise his converts. But the fundamental difference is, that whereas there is clear evidence for this in Paul's case, there is no evidence, apart from this doubtful passage, that either Jesus or his disciples ever baptised.
  2. Goguel: Jean-Baptiste, p.87.
  3. Cf. Spitta: Das Johannes-Evangelium als Quelle der Geschichte Jesu, pp.86-98.

to whom you bore witness'. This is a distinct echo of the first chapter of the Gospel, and too characteristic of the Evangelist to be missed! Nor, as already observed, did all the words attributed to John the Baptist in 3:27-36. They bear too plainly the Johannine stamp both in expression and in theological content. Again, the words, 'Though Jesus himself baptised not, but his disciples', (4:2), are clearly an addition of the Evangelist, (less likely of the Redactor), to his source to harmonise with the prevailing view that Jesus did not baptise, and to correct the anachronism. The crucial point, however, is to determine whether the indications at 3:22, 3:26, and 4:1, that Jesus himself did baptise are to be regarded as having originally stood in the source. Goguel believes that they did because such a viewpoint contradicts the Synoptic tradition, and because it is out of harmony with Johannine thought which could scarcely have envisaged baptism by Jesus himself.<sup>1</sup> There is cogency in this argument, but there is, perhaps, a more cogent counter-argument. The Fourth Evangelist is plainly desirous of bringing Jesus and John side by side at this point in order to put on the lips of the latter a final great testimony to the former. The picture would not be balanced: the stage would not be properly set unless he gave us, on the

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1. Cf. The Life of Jesus, p.275.

one hand, John baptising, on the other, Jesus baptising. Only thus would the picture be perfect, and the testimony really convincing. The Evangelist is acutely conscious, however, of the non-historicity of his picture, and is at pains at 4:2 to correct it by emphatically stating that 'Jesus himself baptised not'. His purpose, nevertheless, had been served. Jesus and John had been represented as baptising together side by side, John, the witness, about to leave the stage, and Jesus, the Son of God, with his earthly glory just beginning. Finally it is to be observed that the extremely awkward reference to the Pharisees at 4:1, whose hostility is given as the alleged reason for Jesus' separation from John, is yet another addition to the source, being an attempt to patch up the quite inconsistent preceding scene. The sudden appearance of the Pharisees is strange and unnatural, and the use of the term *Κύριος* never applied elsewhere to Jesus till after the Resurrection, makes the matter conclusive.<sup>1</sup> It is highly probable that the Pharisees have been introduced here to cover up the real reason for the ultimate departure of Jesus from John - that being a fundamental difference of opinion on the subject of baptism.

If, then, all this additional matter be set aside, it

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1. Cf. The Gospel according to St. John, I.C.C., p.132.

appears that the source used by the Evangelist at this point referred[~~so~~ v.25 ]to 'a question ... about purification'. This source has been radically altered and added to by the Evangelist himself partly because of the unsuitability of the nature of its contents, partly, to establish his oft-repeated and well-beloved contrast of John and Jesus. The source may have been quite an ancient one giving an extremely precious note on the early relations of John and Jesus. The feeling is that the writer of the Fourth Gospel has set forth here an account of things, which, by its very contradictory nature, by its patch-work additions and explanations, and by its characteristic emphasis on the role of John as a witness, is in its present form devoid of chronological significance.

The Synoptics, on the other hand, can better bear examination. It is possible to extract from them certain indications that their viewpoint is the correct one. The first of these is to be derived from the rumour which had spread abroad that Jesus was John risen from the dead.<sup>1</sup> It does not seem probable that such a rumour would have arisen had Jesus gained any measure of popularity during the Baptist's ministry. The impression is rather that Jesus was a little-known Figure till after the Baptist's death, and that the two

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1. Mk.6:14 = Matt.14:2 = Lk.9:7-9; Mk.8:27-29 = Lk.9:18-20.

had never been recognised as working side by side. The second indication is afforded by the words of one of the disciples of Jesus as reported by Luke, 'And it came to pass that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, even as John taught his disciples.'<sup>1</sup> As there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of Luke's report, a two-fold inference may be drawn; first, that the questioner had not yet been taught how to pray. If that were so, he can scarcely have been a disciple of John who, we are informed, specially instructed his disciples in prayer; second, that if the questioner had actually been a disciple of John, he would almost certainly have said, 'Teach us to pray, even as John taught us.' It should be noted that apparently the disciple is not speaking for himself alone, but for the whole inner circle of Jesus' disciples.<sup>2</sup> The third and last indication of a clear distinction between the two groups of disciples, and in no way suggesting a period of parallel activity is given at Mk.2:18-20, 'And John's

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1. 11:1.

2. It is, of course, in the narrower sense of the word "disciple" in which the present argument is to be understood. The argument affects only the Twelve, and those of like allegiance, in the case of Jesus, and only those who had definitely accepted the Baptist's rule and practice, in the case of John. Thus the whole point of the discussion is to discountenance the narrative in Jn.1:35ff. It is quite possible, on the other hand, that not a few of the 'hearers' or 'disciples' of John in the wider sense of the word did actually become 'hearers' or 'disciples' of Jesus.

disciples and the Pharisees were fasting: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bride-chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and they will fast in that day.' These verses referred originally to a difference in practice between the disciples of Jesus and the disciples of John only.<sup>1</sup> The disciples of John very possibly were observing a special mourning fast owing to the imprisonment of their master. It is unnecessary to assume that John was already dead, and that Mark has ante-dated the incident. John's imprisonment, which, no doubt, his disciples feared would have a fatal termination, sufficiently explains their grief. On either view, however, the narrative clearly implies that Jesus already had his disciples, and they do not join with the disciples of John in mourning. 'The sons of the bride-chamber' are quite distinct from the followers of John. They shall have their turn to mourn when their Master is taken away.

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1. The reference to the Pharisees is an editorial insertion intended "to fit the section into its context as an example of conflict between the Pharisees and our Lord", Rawlinson: The Gospel of Mark, p.30.



Finally, it is not without significance that in the Book of Acts there is no evidence to support the view that Jesus recruited his disciples from those of John or that the two ministries overlapped. There are, it would seem, indications to the contrary although it must be admitted, they cannot be stressed. These indications do not appear to have been introduced by Luke to draw special attention to the fact, or to buttress the chronology of his Gospel against any different view. Had this been his intention the matter would have been put much more strongly. In fact, the very incidental nature of the indications lends support to the idea that they are based on a primitive and well-known tradition. Thus at Acts 10:36, Peter says 'The word which God sent unto you ... that word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea and begun from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached.' At Acts 13:23-24, Paul says 'Of this man's seed hath God raised, according to his promise, unto Israel a Saviour Jesus, when John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.' And finally at Acts 19:4, Paul again says, 'John verily baptized ... saying unto the people that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is on Christ Jesus.' These passages seem to convey the impression that the ministry of John was

actually complete before Jesus began his own ministry.

In view of all these facts, the period of parallel activity of John and Jesus as represented in the Fourth Gospel at 3:22ff., together with the description of the passing over of John's disciples to Jesus at 1:35ff., can scarcely be regarded as historical. An apparent historical verisimilitude is given to the narrative by the chronological notes, 'The next day', 1:29, and, 'again the next day after', 1:35, and 'the day following', 1:44, but here, as at 3:22, the Fourth Evangelist has created a *mise en scène* to establish beyond all doubt the idea that John was merely a forerunner and a witness. There can be little doubt that John has replaced the earlier, and, as it seems, the more accurate Synoptic account, "by one modified to suit his own purpose in order to emphasize the passing over of the disciples from the Old Master to the New."<sup>1</sup> On this point, however, the Synoptic record is superior, and there was, it would appear, no period of parallel activity.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Macgregor: op.cit., p.46.

2. It must not be supposed however that the chronology of the Synoptists is on all points superior to that of the Fourth Evangelist. It is very probable that the Fourth Evangelist is correct in lengthening the ministry of Jesus to a period of more than two years, (as contrasted with the Synoptic record of one year), and that, although the ministry of Jesus began in Galilee, allowance must be made in the Synoptic record for the Johannine record of a visit to Jerusalem by Jesus prior to his final visit. On the whole question: cf. Schweitzer: The Quest of the Historical Jesus, pp. 86-87. B.H.Streeter: The Four Gospels, pp.393-426.

(c) The evidence relating to the Baptist's Death.

A very full account of the circumstances of the Baptist's death is given in Mk.6:14-29, and in Matt.14:1-12. At first sight, it might appear somewhat surprising that Luke, who gives so full an account of the birth of John, should omit entirely Mark's narrative of his death. If, however, the Proto-Luke theory be accepted, this will occasion no great difficulty. The explanation would simply be that when Luke came to expand the original draft of his Gospel by adding material from Mark and other sources, the Evangelist did not regard the story of the Baptist's death as suitable for his immediate purpose.<sup>1</sup> If the Proto-Luke theory is not accepted, (the present writer has little hesitation in accepting it), it can only be supposed that Luke deliberately passed over the Marcan story because even he doubted its ability, in its details, at least, to pass as genuine history.

The setting in which the narrative appears in Mark reveals the fact that it is merely a stop-gap to hold the interest from the time when the disciples are sent out by Jesus at 6:12, till their return at 6:30. This is apparent from the unskilful way in which the narrative is introduced. If the text is consulted, it will be seen that there is no real connection between 6:13, and 6:14. What did Herod hear? What

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1. Cf. Vincent Taylor: Behind the Third Gospel, p.138.

relation was there between the sending out of the disciples and Herod's identification of Jesus with John risen from the dead? Plainly, no intelligible one. Vv.14-16 belong to another context. They can be explained only by supposing that at some later stage in the ministry of Jesus, Herod grew hostile towards him, and at this point Jesus had to withdraw from his territory.<sup>1</sup>

For a proper understanding of the Gospel narrative, certain historical facts should be borne in mind. On the death of Herod the Great, his dominions were divided up among three of his sons. His fourth son, who according to Mark and Matthew<sup>2</sup> bore the name of Philip, was deprived of his share of the territory and lived as a private person somewhere in the East.<sup>3</sup> He had married his niece Herodias, the daughter of Aristobulus and the grand-daughter of Herod the Great. Herod Antipas was married to a daughter of Aretas, King of Nabatea. Now, while Herod Antipas was at Rome and residing with his brother Philip, he fell in love with Herodias, his brother's wife. Josephus relates that "an agreement was made for her to change her habitation and come to him; one article of this marriage was this, that he should divorce Aretas' daughter."<sup>4</sup> The daughter of Aretas,

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1. Their true position is possibly after 7:23, at which point Jesus leaves Herod's dominions. Cf. Dibelius: op.cit., p.82.
  2. Mk.6:7, Matt.14:3.
  3. Josephus: Antiq., xviii.5.1.(109ff.).
  4. Ibid.

however, learning of this affair, asked her husband to send her to the fortress of Herod and Aretas. Escaping from Machaerus, she crossed into her father's territory and, as Buzy puts it, "thus escaped the unpleasantness of a summary divorce."<sup>1</sup> The outcome of this unhappy business was that Aretas was furious at the insult done to his daughter, vowed vengeance on Antipas, and after a period declared war against him. Josephus again tells us that "all Herod's army was destroyed by the treachery of some fugitives ... who joined with Aretas' army."<sup>2</sup> It was against this unlawful marriage that John the Baptist raised his voice, 'It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife',<sup>3</sup> and it was John's outspokenness which, the Gospels inform us, brought about his arrest.

Mark tells the story in greater detail than Matthew. The incident is a familiar one. The Baptist is languishing in Herod's dungeons. In the rooms above a birthday feast<sup>4</sup> is being celebrated in Herod's honour. The daughter of Herodias pleases Herod with her dancing so much that he announces, 'Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom.' The girl consults her

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1. The Life of St. John the Baptist, Eng. Ed., p.168.

2. Ibid., 3. Mk.6:18.

4. For the meaning of γενέσις, cf. Schlürer: op.cit., I, vol. ii, p.26, note 27; M. and M.: Vocabulary of the Greek Testament, p.123.

mother and returns with the demand, 'The head of John the Baptist in a platter!' The vexation of Herod is then described for he knew that John the Baptist was 'a just man and a holy man: and when he heard him he did many things and heard him gladly!' At length he gives way to the request 'for his oath's sake and for the sake of those who sat with him'. The executioner is summoned and the head of the Baptist is presently brought in. The narrative closes with the words, 'And when the disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse and laid it in a tomb.' Matthew is shorter. He does not say that Herod regarded John 'as a just and holy man'. Indeed, from his account, 14:4, it would seem that Herod had desired to put John to death long since, but had been restrained because 'he feared the multitude.' The dance of Herodias' daughter elicits only once from Herod the declaration which appears twice in Mark. No mention is made of the executioner, but Matthew adds a very human note at 14:12, stating, that after John's death 'his disciples went and told Jesus'.

There can be little doubt that the original lies with Mark, which Matthew has shortened. If Matthew were the original, it is difficult to explain the inconsistency between Matt.14:4 and 14:9. Herod, we are told, had long since wished to put John to death, (v.4), but, now that the

opportunity had come, he regretted it, (v.9). The difficulty might be removed by supposing that v.9 is an interpolation, or by taking the view that it would have been only natural for Herod to repent before giving the fatal order. But neither of these explanations is likely. V.9 is clearly no interpolation, but is taken over direct from Mark. As for Herod's sensitiveness, one may well ask if it was customary for Oriental princes of Herod's type to evince such feelings. Matthew's account does not ring quite true. Plainly, he has ascribed to Herod himself a personal hatred towards John, which his wife alone bore to him, or at least, he has exaggerated that hatred.

It would be rash to regard these narratives of Mark and Matthew as entirely the product of the legend-building imagination. Yet it may be readily admitted that they contain certain elements which can be accepted only with caution, if at all. Mark commits the same error as the Slavonic author in giving the name of Philip to Herod's fourth son. On this Schürer well observes, "Since, according to Josephus, not the tetrarch Philip, but Herod, was the first husband of Herodias, the statement of Mark and Matthew is evidently a mistake. Many seek to explain away this mistake by assuming that they gave to this Herod the name Herod Philip ..... But it must be admitted as very remarkable that the one name

should be chosen by Josephus, and the other by the New Testament writers: and yet more peculiar would it have been had the old Herod two sons with the name of Philip. We can therefore come to no other conclusion than this .... that the two evangelists made a mistake."<sup>1</sup> Renan sees in the mistake 'an error of inadvertance',<sup>2</sup> and this is probably the correct view, as Mark has probably confused the name of Herodias' husband with that of the husband of Salome, whose name was Philip. Again, Mark refers to Antipas as 'king' whereas, in reality, he was only 'tetrarch', and as regards his offer of half his kingdom, Loisy remarks in his stimulating way, "We may observe, not without reason, that Antipas had not his kingdom to divide and that he had not a free hand in the disposition of the territories which he governed. The influence of the book of Esther on the Gospel redaction can alone explain the exaggeration of the offer."<sup>3</sup> Once more, it was contrary to all etiquette for princesses of royal blood like Salome to dance in public and it is not likely that Salome, who at this time was almost certainly married, could be fitly called a *κορηδαιον* - a title usually reserved for unmarried girls under twenty. Extreme conservatism has an answer to all these difficulties individ-

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1. Schürer: op.cit., I, vol.ii, p.22, note 19.

2. Vie de Jésus, p.114, note 2.

3. Les Évangiles Synoptiques, I, p.426.



ually, but cumulatively they form a formidable array. They stamp the narrative in which they appear as not being entirely historically accurate. Clearly a genuine historical basis has been expanded and embroidered to a certain extent, at least, by popular fancy.

What is the historical basis of the narrative? There can be little doubt that this was the execution of the Baptist by Herod's orders. The captivity of John is vouched for independently by Matthew and Luke.<sup>1</sup> Matthew states that John's disciples visited him in prison.<sup>2</sup> The very fact that Mark does not mention this episode confirms the fact that the captivity and the execution of the Baptist are based on good tradition.<sup>3</sup> It is plain, however, that popular imagination, working upon the bare facts, has succeeded in producing a narrative relating more to Herod than to John, a narrative which is entirely devoid of evangelical interest, and lacking in historical precision. Dibelius is surely right when he observes that the real point of interest in the story is "that a king traps himself in his oath and must do something which he regrets."<sup>4</sup> This was an exceedingly common theme of popular anecdote. One can well imagine how Herod's dark deed would be whis-

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1. Matt.4:12; Lk.3:20.      2. Matt.11:2 = Lk.7:18.  
 3. Cf. Goguel: op.cit., p.56. 4. J.d.T., p.80.

pered round the bazaars and with what pleasure the folk would dwell upon the way in which the hated tetrarch had cornered himself. Fanciful additions would grow with every new account of it. It would be unwise, however, to leave the narrative out of all account whatsoever. It furnishes, as will be seen presently, certain valuable evidence for serious consideration in regard to the chronology of John the Baptist.

If the Gospel narrative of John's death is compared with that of Josephus, certain interesting and important divergences present themselves. Josephus states that the place of John's imprisonment was Machaerus, a gloomy and forbidding fortress on the confines of the territory of Herod and Aretas, and towering 3,000 feet above the Dead Sea.<sup>1</sup> The Gospels make no mention of the place, which is strange because the narrative they contain, being of the anecdotal type, would have been likely to preserve the name of so infamous a fort as Machaerus, had the Baptist really met his end there. The Evangelists suggest that John was imprisoned somewhere in Galilee because the chief men of Galilee are mentioned as being present at the feast. Moreover, it is extremely unlikely that Herod would have chosen a border fortress for John's place of confinement. "To

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1. B.J. vii.6.1.(163ff.).

select such a place on the frontier of Aretas would have been the height of imprudence. It is much more likely that he was imprisoned and put to death, as Mark implies, in Galilee."<sup>1</sup>

A more vital difference arises in the reasons given for John's arrest and execution. According to the Gospels, this was originally due to the pique of Herodias. Josephus, on the other hand, ascribes his arrest to Herod's fear, lest he, the Baptist, might cause political trouble. No account is given by the historian of the banquet with its fatal conclusion. He states simply that "through Herod's suspicion, John was sent as a prisoner to Machaerus and there slain."<sup>2</sup> It must not be inferred from this statement that Josephus himself regarded the Baptist as a political figure. As stated before, he is careful to emphasize that this was Herod's suspicion and Herod's fear. Nevertheless it is significant that the historian regarded this, and not personal pique, as the direct reason for Herod's action. To regard the two viewpoints as irreconcilable is a mistake. Both have their element of truth. The Gospels record the more clamant reason for John's arrest - his attack on Herod's morals, bringing a period of precarious freedom and simmering suspicion to an end. It cannot be denied that

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1. Jackson and Lake: The Beginnings of Christianity, vol.i, p.18.

2. Antiq. xviii.5.2.(119).

such an outburst was entirely in line with his fiery denunciation of the 'offspring of vipers', and this alone should be sufficient to save the Gospel viewpoint, fitting in, as it does, so well with the rest of the picture. On the other hand, it is very probable that Josephus has set aside the tradition embodied in the Gospel narrative, if he knew it at all, not merely because of its historical inexactitudes, but because it would have been untactful to rake up memories so peculiarly undesirable in the fact of his patrons. There can be little doubt, however, that the Baptist, by his stinging censure of the morals of his day, and by the very fact of his gathering around him so large a following, would inspire in Herod a certain trepidation lest the moral preacher, seemingly harmless enough, were really something more than he appeared to be. But that this suspicion was unfounded, and that John's ministry was not designedly of a political nature, will be shown in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup> Meantime, it is to be noted that the reason given by the historian for the Baptist's arrest is historically extremely probable, and that it goes hand in hand with that of the Gospels.<sup>2</sup> Josephus

1. Chapter V. pp.255-260.

2. Loisy: Les Evangiles Synoptiques, vol.i, pp.922-923, admits that the reasons given by the Gospels and Josephus are compatible. "Josephus speaks as an historian sufficiently well instructed in Herodian politics: the Gospel story is presented as a popular legend in which everything is explained by the mutual relations of the persons in the case." Dibelius: op.cit., extends the preference to Josephus.

gives the long-standing reason, the Gospels, the immediate one. Both are correct, and it would be rash to extend the preference to the one or to the other.

Finally, whereas Josephus indicates that the Baptist's execution took place immediately after his arrest, the Gospels imply that a certain time elapsed between his apprehension and his death.<sup>1</sup> It is very probable that this divergence is more apparent than real, and that Josephus has omitted all reference to a period of imprisonment in view of the brevity of his notice. This consideration leads directly to considering the date of the Baptist's death.

Josephus relates that "the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army was the work of God, who thus exacted a very just retribution for John, surnamed the Baptist."<sup>2</sup> The defeat referred to was that which Herod suffered at the hands of Aretas in 36 A.D.. It was maintained by Keim<sup>3</sup> that since Herod's defeat took place in this year, the death of John must be dated shortly before that, possibly a year earlier at the longest, because John's death and Herod's defeat went closely together in popular thought. A similar view was held by other scholars, but the theory seemed likely to be abandoned till Eisler resuscitated it, and proceeded to buttress it by other arguments of his own.

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1. Matt.11:2 = Lk.7:18.

2. Antiq.xviii.5.2.(116).

3. The History of Jesus of Nazara, Eng.Ed., vol.iv, p.223.

One of these was, as already noted, that the Slavonic Version represents John as still alive at the time of Philip's death in 34 A.D.. It would appear, then, Eisler holds, that John outlived Jesus, and that the date of John's death was not before 35 A.D.. This argument may be dismissed owing to the untrustworthy nature of the Slavonic Fragments. Another of his arguments<sup>1</sup> is based upon the position at which John's death is recounted by Josephus in the Antiquities. He points out that the historian has already referred to the deaths of Jesus and Philip, and only immediately before Herod's defeat (in 36 A.D.) does Josephus refer to John's death.

Conclusion: that John outlived Jesus. In reply to this, it may be said that it was quite natural for Josephus to recount John's death at the point he did. The notice is introduced by the statement that some of the Jews saw in Herod's defeat a very just retribution for his actions towards John. What could be more natural than to add here a short account of the prophet's work and death? It need not be supposed that this stands in its correct chronological setting. It is rather a reminiscence, taking the form of an aside from the main thread of the narrative. That it is an aside, and not in its correct position, is shown by the repetition of the introductory words below, "Now the Jews thought that the destruction of

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1. The Messiah Jesus, p.291.

Herod's army etc.". Here the main thread is picked up, and the history proceeds smoothly from this point.<sup>1</sup>

Eisler's arguments in favour of the year 35 A.D. for the Baptist's death add nothing to support that date as already advocated by Keim. This position, in itself, is not without its vulnerability. In the first place, it does not allow sufficiently for the probability that popular belief would retain over a considerable number of years the memory of a crime inflicted on one who had been their hero, and that it would see in Herod's punishment proof of the fact that divine punishment is sometimes slow, but always sure. Second, the theory assumes that the marriage between Antipas and Herodias took place about 35 or 36 A.D., because Aretas declared war on Herod in 36 A.D.. There are no valid grounds for this assumption. Josephus implies that this marriage had been the beginning of the hatred between Aretas and Herod, and that they had been for long at daggers drawn, Aretas awaiting his chance. His first really favourable opportunity came only in 36 A.D. when the Romans were at war with the Parthians and could not help Herod. In view of these facts, it would be precarious to regard the date of Herod's defeat as giving any

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1. Jack: The Historic Christ, p.247, points out that there is a similar instance in the Hegesippus, where the crucifixion of Jesus follows the uprising of the Samaritan messiah in 35 A.D..

true indication as to the year of the Baptist's death.

In the Gospels it is clearly stated that John the Baptist did not outlive Jesus. This is plain not only from the Marcan and Matthaean records of his death which place it at some point during the ministry of Jesus, but also from the passages in which it is reported that the people and Herod believed that Jesus was John risen from the dead.<sup>1</sup> It is quite impossible that Herod could have believed this unless John were already dead, and it is barely possible that the people could have shared the belief unless John had been actually only in a state of close confinement, and the rumour had got around that he had already been executed. Eisler falls back upon this possibility! "A careful comparison of the relevant passages<sup>2</sup> at once shews that Lk.9:7, and an array of MSS. at Mk.6:14, quote the saying only as a popular opinion, and not as a statement of Herod's. Lk.9:9, indeed, makes the tetrarch reject this belief as impossible."<sup>3</sup> Yet, whatever array of MSS. at Mk.6:14 ascribes the words to the people by the use of the plural, (ἐλαγόν), there still remains satisfactory evidence in favour of the singular,

1. Mk.6:14-16; Matt.14:1; Lk.9:7-9.

2. Mk.6:14-16; Matt.14:1ff.; Lk.9:7-9.

3. The Messiah Jesus, p.304.



(ἐλάγχε), and this is, perhaps, the correct reading.<sup>1</sup> In any case there can be no doubt about Matt.14:2, 'At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist: he is risen from the dead: and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.' Observe how Eisler disposes of this statement! The reference to John's being risen from the dead is not original, he tells us, "because the idea that one who is risen from the dead thereby becomes forthwith capable of miraculous acts of power is unsupported."<sup>2</sup> Unsupported, perhaps, as far as our records go, but by no means impossible, surely, considering the uniqueness of the mighty acts of Jesus, and the stabs of a guilty conscience! As for Mk. 6:16, Eisler is forced to take this as an ironical question, "But when Herod heard thereof, he said, 'It surely isn't John, whom I beheaded, is it?', whereas the natural meaning of the Greek is, 'It is John whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead.' Finally, Eisler maintains that Mk.6:16, taken as an ironical question, is supported by Lk.9:9, 'And Herod said, John have I beheaded: but who is this of whom

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1. It is true that the impersonal plural is characteristic of Mark; cf. C.H. Turner: Journal of Theological Studies, xxv, 1924, pp.378-386, but the singular suits the sense better and is supported by Matt.14:2. Neither Mk.8:28 nor Lk.9:7 can be cited as 'guarantees' for the plural when so many good authorities have the singular. "It is improbable, in any case, that Herod would take up a common rumour, whereas it is evident that this strange conjecture started with the king's conscience." I.C.C., p.109. The repetition of the statement in v.16 shews that Herod does not entertain the other views (v.15), but that he regards his original opinion (v.14) as correct.

2. Op.cit., p.305.

I hear such things?' In reality, no such support is given by the Lucan parallel. Plainly, the meaning is that although Herod is aware that he has beheaded the Baptist, he was becoming increasingly apprehensive lest Jesus might be John risen. This is entirely in line with the fact that Herod was a Sadducee, and that only in the most special and unique circumstance would he have concluded that Jesus was John re-embodied. But the circumstances were undoubtedly of this nature, and the evidence of Luke, far from contradicting Mark, when taken in its simplest and most natural way, constitutes a most precious statement in support of the accuracy of the latter.

It is manifest, then, that only by arbitrary alterations and strained interpretations of the Gospel texts can any support be derived for the view that John outlived Jesus. Admittedly, at Lk.3:20 John's arrest is described in a sentence which is "strangely halting",<sup>1</sup> and which contains a somewhat awkward repetition of the name 'Herod', but to regard the sentence as originally having contained no reference to John's imprisonment, and to have terminated at  $\pi\omicron\nu\eta\rho\acute{\omega}\nu$  and to take the second 'Herod' as belonging to a new sentence - a later interpolation - and translating, 'And Herod added this above all that he shut up John in prison' - all this

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1. Eisler: op.cit., p.306.

does not alleviate in the slightest the grammatical difficulty - for this reason. It would be necessary to suppose, on this view, that the interpolated sentence was introduced without a connecting particle, inasmuch as it is most improbable that the said particle would have been omitted later by some copyist, who thus accidentally concealed the interpolated sentence, and made it appear to belong to the preceding one. The omission of a particle at this point is a flaw which even the clumsiest of interpolators would have been careful to avoid. The fact is, that the sentence, though somewhat harsh in grammatical construction, though by no means without parallel, stands just as Luke wrote it, and the theory that it is a later interpolation inserted with the intention of finally demonstrating to John's disciples "that their Master lay helpless and inactive in prison, while Jesus was performing mighty deeds"<sup>1</sup> is a pure figment of the imagination. Such a viewpoint pre-supposes that a large and powerful continuing group of Johannine disciples were at work in opposition to the disciples of Jesus - a matter the likelihood of which has still to be examined.<sup>2</sup> Apart from this, it may well be asked why the interpolator, if he were so anxious to have John in prison and to demonstrate his helplessness, did not clinch the

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1. Eisler: op.cit., p.307.

2. Chapter IV.

matter by stating that he was dead! Surely this would have been the best way to remove all basis for further argument. As for the objection that the Fourth Evangelist does not record John's death, he does not recount either the baptism of Jesus by John! The Fourth Evangelist has selected his material with some care, and the narrative describing John's death would scarcely have had any direct bearing on the promulgation of his thesis that Jesus is the Son of God. There are, however, certain indications in the Fourth Gospel that John did not outlive Jesus, the most definite being at 5:35, 'He (John) was the lamp that burneth and shineth.' True, this may refer only to John's imprisonment, implying that his period of active witnessing was over, but it is much more natural to refer it to his death. Like Luke, the Fourth Evangelist does not mention explicitly the Baptist's execution, but in both Gospels his death is implicit, while the narratives of Mark and Matthew put the matter beyond all doubt.

In conclusion it may be said that the joint evidence on which reliance may be put, points quite clearly to the fact that John did not outlive Jesus. He was executed, after a period of confinement, at some point, (perhaps about mid-way), in the public ministry of Jesus, and if Jn.5:35 can be trusted, his death took place before the date of the feast

referred to in Jn.5:1, i.e. not later than 29 A.D.. If Jesus was crucified on the 14th of Nisan of that year, the Chronology adopted by most modern reckonings,<sup>1</sup> the Baptist was put to death some time before this date.

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1. Cf. G.H.C. Macgregor: The Gospel of John, p.xiii.

CHAPTER III.

## THE BAPTISM OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

## A.

Consideration may now be given to the baptism of John the Baptist, and the light which this remarkable rite throws upon his personality. The designation "remarkable" is appropriate, not because there was anything new in the practice of baptism itself, but because it is rather surprising that John who, after all, was only one among many who baptised, should have borne the specific title 'Baptiser' or 'Baptist'.<sup>1</sup> The explanation of this is, may be, that whereas, originally, John was referred to not as Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτιστής at all, (there is no Aramaic equivalent for the Greek word), but simply as Ἰωάννης, at a later stage ὁ βαπτίζων and ὁ βαπτιστής came to be closely attached to his name as descriptive of his well-known practice, and from the very closeness of the association tended to take the form of a title. βαπτιστής shows the completion of this process as a title fully developed for him in early

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1. βαπτίζειν means 'to dip' or 'sink'. It is employed not infrequently in a literal and metaphorical sense, but only twice does it appear to contain the idea of religious lustration. Jud.12:7, Eccus.31:35. λούεσθαι and βάπτειν are regularly used in this connexion. The word may have come into use, (as Jackson and Lake suggest), in Greek-speaking Jewish Christian circles as meaning 'religious washings'.

Christian circles, further suggested no doubt, by the consideration that he had baptised our Lord. *Βαπτιστής*, then, should be regarded in its original form not strictly as a name or title, but rather as an epithet descriptive of his work. As such, however, its appearance in connection with John loses none of its novelty. To account for it the possibility arises that in the baptismal rite of John, there was something striking and original, something which distinguished it from contemporary baptismal rites, with the result that John came to be referred to as 'the one who baptised' or 'the baptiser' par excellence. To discover such characteristics it will be necessary to investigate the origin, method and significance of John's baptism. This investigation is preceded by a short examination of the locality in which John carried out his baptismal work, and is rounded off by considering the relations, if any, between John's baptism and Christian Baptism. The Baptism of Jesus is dealt with in a separate section.

(a) The locality of John's baptism.

It is generally assumed that the Jordan was the principal site of the Baptist's activity. In this connection, however, the following points may be noted. First, Josephus says nothing about John's having baptised in the Jordan. Brandt<sup>1</sup>

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1. Die jüdischen Baptismen, pp.74-75.

thinks this very remarkable, since the historian, he holds, would not have failed to mention so important a site. Second, the Fourth Evangelist is also silent as regards the Jordan, and his silence is even more striking than the silence of Josephus. He gives Bethabara (A.V.) or Bethany,<sup>1</sup> and Aenon near to Salim<sup>2</sup> as localities in which John baptised. Third, the question of Jesus, 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see?' is somewhat strange, because one would have expected 'to the Jordan' had John really baptised there.<sup>3</sup> Finally, it is pointed out that baptism in the Jordan would not have been agreeable, if not actually dangerous, in view of the muddy yellowness of its water and the speed of its flow. Considering these facts, Brandt suggests, though with the utmost caution, that John had no real connection at all with the River Jordan, and that the main centres of his activity were in the neighbourhood of various towns and villages throughout Galilee, Judea, and Perea.

The main objection to this theory is that it is not easy to see how the tradition that John baptised in the Jordan could have arisen unless he had actually done so. The tradition is so firmly rooted in the Synoptics that it is practically certain that for some period in his life at least he must have been known to summon the people to baptism

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1. 1:28.

2. 3:22,23.

4. Brandt: op.cit., p.71.



at this point. Perhaps, however, it is a mistake to regard the Jordan as the place at which the Baptist spent the major portion of his life. This was only one district among many in which he executed his task. Herein lies the true significance of the above-mentioned arguments. The silence of Josephus and the Fourth Evangelist shews not necessarily that they knew nothing about John's activity on the Jordan, but that they did not think it essential to single out this specific theatre of activity. The question of Jesus, 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see?' refers, as already noted,<sup>1</sup> to an earlier period of the Baptist's work, and points very conclusively in the direction that John moved constantly from place to place. As for the danger of baptism in the Jordan, it is almost incredible that there was not some spot safe enough, e.g. a ford, to carry out the rite without peril! Far from being an unsuitable place, the Jordan would have been a most convenient one for a time, at least, selected, no doubt, because of the numerous caravans which would pass to and fro. But would it have been wise to have remained too long in one particular spot in view of the suspicion of the government authorities?

It is possible to determine roughly, at least, at which part of the river John baptized for a certain time. The southern reaches are definitely indicated by Mark<sup>2</sup> and Matthew<sup>3</sup>

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1. Chapter I, p. 68.

2. 1:5.

3. 3:5.

by the reference to the people of Jerusalem going out to John's baptism. It is probable that after a period of preaching in the wilderness, 'John came into all the country round about Jordan'<sup>1</sup> near the point at which it enters the Dead Sea, and there started baptising at some ford on the caravan route from Jerusalem to Perea via Jericho.

The Fourth Evangelist mentions (a) 'Bethabara' (A.V.)<sup>2</sup> as a site of John's activity, but the reading 'Bethany, beyond Jordan' is to be preferred both on textual grounds and because the addition 'beyond Jordan' is clearly meant to distinguish this Bethany from the well-known village of the same name situated a mile or two S.E. of Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> The reading 'Bethabara' is very probably due to a topographical suggestion of Origen, who states that although all the best MSS. read 'Bethany beyond Jordan', he could not find any village of that name on the banks of that river, whereas a place called 'Bethabara' some miles inland on the East side of the river was pointed out to him.<sup>4</sup> This is better than to suppose, as Loisy does, that Bethabara was the original reading and that Bethany was substituted on the strength of John 10:40, 11:1, where the name Bethany occurs shortly after a reference to the place where John first baptised.<sup>5</sup> It is

1. Lk.3:3.

2. 1:28.

3. Cf. Macgregor: The Gospel of John, p.26.

4. Origen: Commentary on St. John, vi, 40, cited by Macgregor: op.cit., ibid. ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἔβρισκεν ἐν τῇ ἑσθίᾳ Βηθανίαν ἀναγινώσκων, ἀλλὰ Βηθαβάρην.

5. See further Macgregor: op.cit., ibid. The reference is to Loisy: Le Quatrième Évangile, pp.211-214.

more attractive, too, than to suppose with Kunds<sup>1</sup> that the reference to Bethany in the Fourth Gospel is by no means ancient, but that it arose because Christians were wont to make pilgrimages at the time of the composition of the Gospel to Bethany as a site especially venerated from its associations with Gospel history, and hence, that the Evangelist has inaccurately substituted a Christian place of veneration for a Baptist centre. It is much more natural to suppose that the said pilgrims would find Bethany already mentioned in the Gospel texts as a sacred place, and the veneration of the spot would be due to this fact. As to the location of this Bethany, C.R.Corder, according to G.A.Smith<sup>2</sup>, identifies it with Batanea or Bashan, but this is improbable because at Jn.1:18 priests and Levites are represented as having been sent to Bethany to question John. This implies that Bethany was not at any very great distance from Jerusalem, whereas the province of Batanea lies well to the N.E.. The identification of the site of Bethabara and Bethany, which would only be possible in any case if both words mean 'house of the ferry boat' is unlikely for the same reason. Bethabara is at least 100 miles from Jerusalem. It is suggested that Furrer may be right in his identification of Bethany with Betâne, which, although it is some way

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1. Topologische Überlieferungstoffe im Johannes-Evangelium, Forsch: zur Religion und Literatur, N.F., xxii, pp.18-25.
  2. Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible, vol.i, p.255b.

from the Jordan, may have been a point at which John baptised, since his ministry was essentially an itinerant one.<sup>1</sup> The safest view however, is to regard Bethany as some little known village in South Perea, possibly not far from the original place at which John worked, in view of the deputation sent from Jerusalem. The Fourth Evangelist mentions also (b) Aenon near to Salim<sup>2</sup> as a theatre of John's activity. Aenon is probably to be located on the West side of the river Jordan in Samaria, and possibly not far from Shechem.<sup>3</sup> Here, the Baptist would be safe from Herod Antipas, and as 'there was much water there', he may have spent a considerable time at this place. Objection has been taken to the view that John would minister in Samaritan territory, and it has been thought that the reference to Aenon and Salim is purely symbolical.<sup>4</sup> Thus Aenon (Springs), and Salim (Peace) signify a baptism preparatory to a greater one - that of Melchizedek, the Prince of Peace. This seems altogether too far-fetched. At 3:22 the reference to these places has

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1. Macgregor: op.cit., ibid. 2. Jn. 3:22.

3. Cf. W.Bauer: Das Johannesevangelium, p.39, "According to Eusebius, Onom. p.40, Aenon and Salim lie eight miles south of Scythopolis in the very north of Samaria. In Samaria, 5½ kilometres east of Shechem, there is to be found today a place called Salim." Some doubt exists as to the exact location of the spot, but there is reason to believe that it lay in Samaria.

4. E.g. by Loisy: Le Quatrième Evangile, p.332, note 2; W.Bauer: op.cit., p.39.

every appearance of a sober topographical note, and since John could move about with complete safety in Samaria, this consideration largely counteracts the improbability of his having ministered in that territory. Aenon near to Salim is very probably another historical site of John's baptism - a site, it is worth observing, readily accessible both from Judea and Galilee.

Now, if John began his activity in the Wilderness of Judea, and if the baptism of Jesus formed the culminating point both in his relations with Jesus, and in his own ministry, the topographical notes may perhaps fit in as follows:-

- (a) John preaches in the Wilderness without baptising.
- (b) John appears in the South Jordan district at a ford on the caravan route from Jerusalem to Perea. He begins baptising.
- (c) John continues his activity at Bethany in Perea, where the suspicions of Herod are roused.
- (d) John withdraws to Aenon in Samaria, where Jesus, coming from Galilee, first meets John, and where, it would seem, the discussion takes place between John and Jesus regarding baptism.
- (e) John, accompanied by Jesus, returns along the Jordan valley to the southern reaches of the river. Jesus is baptised, and leaves John.
- (f) John risks going into Perea once more, and possibly accuses Herod directly on the score of his unlawful marriage. He is at once arrested by Antipas.
- (g) John is sent to some prison in Galilee, and after a period of confinement, is executed. Immediately after John's imprisonment, the ministry of Jesus opens.

(b) The origin of John's baptism.

For a true appreciation of the genius of John's baptism, a short account must be given of the history of baptisms in general. The practice had its origin in animistic conceptions of the universe, and reaches back into the mists of antiquity. "Water obviously purifies the body from dirt: then as its powers become enhanced in the primitive mind, it can cleanse from evil considered as a material or spiritual pollution, or can ward it off by a species of magical virtue; until finally, it comes to be thought that it can also cleanse from the stain of moral guilt."<sup>1</sup> This process while by no means peculiar to the Jewish religion may be admirably illustrated thereby. It is natural to suppose that the Israelites, in the nomadic stage of their existence, shared the tabu-conception of the peoples with whom they came in contact. By this is meant that certain men or things, by dint of their connection with the mysterious forces of nature, became possessed of a strange and dangerous power. In time the mysterious forces of nature came to be represented as living powers or gods, and those who came in contact with them, were avoided. A thorough purification by water was regarded as the best means of escape from this state.<sup>2</sup> With

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1. J.A.MacCulloch: E.R.E., vol.ii, p.367.

2. Sand was sometimes used, but was not considered so effective. Cf. Brandt: Die jüdischen Baptismen, p.10.

the coming of monotheism and with the growing importance of the priests in the life of the people of Israel, lustrations were considered necessary before and after coming into contact with the 'Holiness' of Jahweh, and were carried out by the priests.<sup>1</sup> The pre-exilic practice was greatly extended and varied in the post-exilic period with the enforcement of Ezra's Priestly Code - a Code which this remarkable man brought back with him from Babylonia, and which in 444 B.C. was accepted by the Jewish community as containing rules from the hand of Moses to be obeyed.<sup>2</sup> The minutest regulations were laid down for purification - regulations in which traces of the old animistic ideas unmistakably appear. Contact with a dead man or beast, with a newly born child or with a leper required immediate lustration, and the nature of the lustration varied according to the seriousness of the offence committed.<sup>3</sup> Though affecting the priests in particular, it cannot be doubted that these regulations caused considerable activity, if not anxiety, among the people in general. Already, however, or shortly afterwards, the view that water washes away moral guilt had been suggested, but apparently not immediately

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1. I.Sam.16:5; Exod.19:10,14,22; Lev.6:20, 16:23; Numb.19:7, 8,10,21.

2. The Babylonian water-rites, e.g. that of 'Holy Water' would doubtless impress the exiled Jews, and give a new impetus to the practice.

3. Cf. Leviticus, Numbers, passim. Parts of these books probably belong to this period. Cf. also Frazer: The Golden Bough, pp.194-262.

developed. Thus Zechariah<sup>1</sup> prophesies, 'In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness', and Ezekiel<sup>2</sup>, likewise, 'Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean.' The Hellenistic period (331 B.C. - 167 B.C.) gave a further impetus to baptisms. However stubbornly the Jew resisted the encroachment of the Greek in other spheres, it is clear that the intermingling of the two resulted in new and refined types of lustration, in external form, at least. Sumptuous baths were constructed in many towns in Palestine, and similar steps were taken in the vicinity of the Temple and on the Mount of Olives.<sup>3</sup> It is doubtful, however, where these were used in this period for religious purifications. Brandt thinks it scarcely likely because the poor would not have been able to pay so often the price of admission. In fact it is improbable that complete immersion was the recognised procedure, inasmuch as water was very scarce at certain seasons, and had to be kept for drinking purposes.<sup>4</sup> Finally, at the time of Jesus, there were in operation certain lustrations not actually mentioned in the Law, but no doubt comprehended by it, the washing of

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1. 13:1. The date of the passage is, unfortunately, uncertain.

2. 36:25. The date is again uncertain.

3. Mishnah, Parah, 3:7, "The elders used to go to the Mount of Olives. There was a place of immersion there."

4. Op.cit., pp.34-35.



hands before meals, a bath before meals<sup>1</sup>, and divers cleanings of eating and drinking vessels.<sup>2</sup>

Baptisms, then, in the sense of purificatory lustrations were a familiar feature in Palestine at the time of John the Baptist. Their motive was a religious one, and the method employed was generally aspersion. Special emphasis was laid upon the quality of the water to be used. It had to be essentially pure, and was usually run off from springs and collected in natural or constructed basins, (miquoth), from which it could be drawn off when required. There is little evidence that the rite was practised in the open. In the Diaspora, it appears that the rigidity of the rules regarding the quality of water was slackened. This was perfectly natural, as the Jews would have before them the example of their heathen neighbours who bathed in the Tigris, Euphrates, and Tiber, and it would be felt that streams and rivers might be suitably used for the purpose. "The water of the rivers whose source man knew not would be reckoned as a more or less pure form of spring-water."<sup>3</sup> It is important to observe, however, that according to the Parah Tractate, the River Jordan had never been considered entirely suitable for general

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1. Mk.7:4b. The verse is not quite clear. The washing may refer either to the people coming from the market, or to the purchases made there.

2. Mk.7.

3. Brandt: op.cit., p.47. Cf. Judith, 12:7, "Judith washed herself at the fountain of water in the camp."

lustration, because its water was mixed with brackish water.<sup>1</sup>  
The baptism of John the Baptist was therefore essentially extra-legal.

Together with these ceremonial purifications, there fall for consideration as possible influences behind John's baptism, the baptism of the Jewish proselytes and the baptism of the Essenes.

The subject of Jewish proselyte baptism is generally admitted to be one of the most obscure and difficult problems in the whole round of Jewish literature.<sup>2</sup> It is not certain when this rite had its origin, but it was in operation by the end of the first century A.D.. Epictetus probably refers to it, stating that when the Gentiles underwent the experience 'of the Baptized and the chosen', then they were in reality Jews.<sup>3</sup> The rite is mentioned also in the Babylonian Talmud, according to which Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua, who held office towards the end of the first century A.D., engaged in a dispute as to the correct method of performing the ceremony. Rabbi Eliezer was for circumcision only, without baptism, Rabbi Joshua for baptism, without circumcision.

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1. 8:10, "The waters of Keramiyon and the Puga are invalid because they are miry waters. The waters of the Jordan and Yarmuk are invalid because they are mixed waters. R. Judah declares them invalid." On this, Strack and Billerbeck: Kommentar zum N.T., I, p.109, observe that perhaps the invalidity applied only to special cases, but no such limitation is implied in the text. For the translation, cf. Danby's Mishnah, p.707.
  2. In addition to the articles in the Encyclopaediae on this subject, cf. Journal of Theological Studies, xii, pp.437-445; xiii, pp.411-414.
  3. Diss. ii, 9.

The solution hit upon was to adopt both circumcision and baptism.<sup>1</sup> Finally there is a reference to the rite in the Mishnah, in which it appears that a difference of opinion arose between the schools of Shammai and Hillel as to the correct procedure for the newly-made proselyte.<sup>2</sup> Whether the rite was generally practised before this time is open to doubt. It is possible, on the one hand, that the water element was added to the original form, i.e. circumcision alone - on the analogy of the Christian baptism of proselytes, and that baptism tended to displace circumcision.<sup>3</sup> It is certainly surprising that the rite is not mentioned in our sources where allusions to it would naturally have been expected. On the other hand, it may have been that the rite was not in operation in all districts till the end of the first century. Hitherto it may have been confined to special parts only, and have had a gradual growth till finally it was widely accepted and adopted. This would partly explain the silence of our sources, and the possibility would arise that the Jewish proselyte baptism may have influenced Christian baptism, and that already in the Baptist's time, the rite was known. In favour of this view is the consideration that the proselyte baptism had

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1. Cf. Strack and Billerbeck: op.cit., 1, pp.104-106.

2. Pesahim, 8:8. Cf. Danby's Mishnah, p.148.

3. Strack and Billerbeck, op.cit., 1, p.102.

marked affinities with the old Levitical water-rites, suggesting that its antecedents may be traced to these. The main objection to this view - one which cannot but be regarded as a serious one - is that running water was generally used for the proselyte baptism. The candidate stood in the water reaching to his neck during the recitation of the commandments of the Law, and then plunged his head beneath, totally submerging himself. Running water was, as already observed, not considered to meet with the legal requirements as to the purity of water till the time of the Diaspora. This accords very well with the lack of evidence relating to the rite before that period, and points to the conclusion that the proselyte baptism was influenced by the Christian, rather than vice versa.<sup>1</sup> It may be noted, too, that the Jewish proselyte baptism was essentially an act of ritual purification, whereas the baptism of John the Baptist, embodied, as will be seen, a moral element as well.

If it is open to doubt whether the Jewish proselyte baptism existed at the time of John, there can be no such doubt regarding the existence of the baptisms of the Essenes.<sup>2</sup> The

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1. Cf. Lietzmann: E.Br., 14th ed., vol.iii, p.82, "It can be said definitely that Christian baptism cannot be derived from this Jewish prototype, because Christian Jews also had to undergo Christian baptism, whilst the meaning of proselyte baptism, as the washing away of ritual impurity, could only have been considered in relation to pagans."
  2. An excellent account of this sect is given by Schürer: op. cit., II, vol.ii, pp.188-218; also a bibliography.

principal data bearing on this sect are to be found in Josephus<sup>1</sup>, Philo<sup>2</sup>, and Pliny the Elder<sup>3</sup>. Josephus first mentions them at the time of Jonathan the Maccabee, (circa 150 B.C.), and places them alongside the Pharisees and Sadducees as a third sect of the Jews.<sup>4</sup> He tells us that he himself had passed through the three courses of Essenism.<sup>5</sup> Various suggestions have been made as to the origin and meaning of the name. Philo connects it with *Ὅσιοι*, (the Pious ones), but perhaps this was due to the fact that the Essenes were indeed pious rather than to strict etymological derivation. In the first century A.D. the Essenes were about 4000 strong, and were spread over almost the whole of Palestine. They were ascetics, wore white clothes, lived in their own convents, and cultivated a peculiar sanctity and calmness of life. They were divided into four classes, and admission to each of the grades was preceded by lustration. Before their mid-day meal they came together to a special place in the open, and washed their body with cold water. If they came into contact with persons not belonging to their order, a thorough cleansing of the whole body was essential. Even if in their own order a member of a lower grade came into contact with a member of a higher grade, the

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1. B.J., ii.8.2. (119ff.); Antiq., xviii.1.5.(18ff.).

2. Quod Omnis Probus Liber, 12.

3. Nat.Hist., v, 17.

4. Antiq., xiii.5.9. (171ff.).

5. Vita, 2.(10).

same rigorous purificatory rules were enforced. They did not engage in trade and barter, but shared their goods, and practised charitable activities. The sun was specially revered by them. "Before the sun is up they utter no word on profane matters but offer to him certain prayers as though entreating him to rise."<sup>1</sup> They were forbidden to insult his rays by any act of uncleanness. While highly esteeming the Law of Moses, diligently studying the Holy Scripture, and keeping the Sabbath with extraordinary rigour, they nevertheless seem to have rejected the offering of animal sacrifices in the Temple.<sup>2</sup> They held the angels in great honour, believed in the pre-existence and immortality of the soul, and in reward and retribution in the hereafter. In this respect, Josephus tells us, their beliefs were in harmony with those 'of the sons of Greece'. It appears too that they possessed certain esoteric books on which they constantly nourished their minds.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Josephus mentions another order of Essenes, who, he says, permitted marriage for the continuance of the race only. In this connexion, too, various lustrations were carried out with the most scrupulous care.<sup>4</sup>

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1. B.J., ii.8.5.(128).

2. Antiq., xviii.1.5.(19.). The exact interpretation of this passage is doubtful. Cf. Branscomb: Jesus and the Law of Moses, pp.61-63.

3. B.J., ii.8.12.(159.).

4. B.J., ii.8.13.(160ff.).

The Essenes present an interesting problem. Whether the opinion of Josephus is correct, viz. that the Essenes were a third sect of the Jews, or whether they were in reality quite without the pale of Palestinian Judaism, or whether they were a sub-sect of the Pharisees, is open to doubt. On this Loewe writes, "That they were a separate sect used to be the accepted view. It was held that foreign influences, Persian or Buddhist or Pythagorean or Syrian were responsible for the Essenes. The opposite view, that of Kohler, is, in the main, true: he regards the Essenes as 'a branch of the Pharisees who conformed to the most rigid rules of levitical purity, while aspiring to the highest degree of holiness.'"<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Klausner writes, "There is nothing in Essenism, so far as we know, to force us to the conclusion that it contains anything derived from the Pythagorean philosophy .... as Zeller, in his Philosophy of Greece, tries to insist."<sup>2</sup> Schürer, too, thinks that "Essenism is first and mainly a Jewish formation".<sup>3</sup> Yet, in view of the facts that the Essenes seem to have rejected animal sacrifices, and that they conducted their baptisms in the open, it seems that their procedure could not have been regarded as falling within the scope of legal Jewish

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1. E.Br., 14th ed., vol.viii, pp.718-719.

2. Jesus of Nazareth, p.209.

3. Op.cit., II, vol.ii, p.218.

baptisms, at least. It is true that many of their doctrines and practices seem to have Pharisaism as their basis, and that it might be possible to understand Josephus' reference to their veneration of the sun as meaning no more than that the Essenes "just before sunrise turned eastward, and said the usual Jewish prayers like men who implore that the sun may rise."<sup>1</sup> But if this is all that is meant, it is certainly peculiarly expressed. Whether Josephus is really "appealing to the non-Jewish world to see that Judaism included a mystery religion, an association for philosophic life"<sup>2</sup> or whether the account of the historian has been worked over "with a philosophic veneer in an attempt to approximate it to Greek ideas"<sup>3</sup> are points on which there is no general consensus of opinion. The possibility cannot be altogether ruled out, but it seems not improbable that the Essenes themselves developed these ideas in the first century A.D. through contact with Hellenism. On the whole, it is somewhat difficult to think that the Essenes were originally a Jewish sect or sub-sect. More probably they were of early origin, (hence their primitive ideas about the sun), and at a later stage, (circa 200-150 B.C.), they were joined by a considerable number of Jews who were im-

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1. Foakes Jackson: Josephus and the Jews, p.76, foot-note.

2. Foakes Jackson: op.cit., p.75.

3. Klausner: op.cit., p.209.



pressed by their particular discipline of life. Naturally the original group would tend to absorb the beliefs and practices of the Jews who joined them, and this may have given them the appearance of a distinct Jewish sect. At a still later stage they were influenced by Greek ideas, and possibly with the general relaxation of the rules in the Diaspora came to be regarded as a third sect alongside of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The data already given regarding the practices of the Essenes make it quite clear that there existed no real connection between them and John the Baptist. The only similarity lies in the asceticism common to both, but this is much too general a characteristic to be of decisive value. There is no trace of a cult of the sun or of angels in John's teaching, nothing is said about various grades among his followers; and nothing about their possession of esoteric books. It is very surprising, therefore, to find writers asserting that John the Baptist and his followers are to be counted among the Essenes as a matter of course. Thus Graetz can even write, "The Essene who thus abjured the Israelites was John the Baptist (his name doubtless meaning the Essene, he who daily bathed and cleansed himself in spring water)"!<sup>1</sup> Like the baptism of the Jewish proselytes, and unlike John's baptism,

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1. History of the Jews, vol.ii, p.146.

the baptisms of the Essenes partook of the nature of a ritual purification.<sup>1</sup> The baptisms of the Essenes were repeated again and again, whereas there is no evidence that the baptism of John was performed more than once in each individual case.

Although the O.T. purifications and the baptisms of the Essenes cannot be invoked as direct parallels to the baptism of John, and therefore wholly explanatory of his rite, it seems that their very existence and widespread employment may explain to a certain extent John's practice. This explanation is much better at any rate than to go further afield and to explain John's baptism by the water-rites peculiar to other religions. That these existed is of course quite undeniable. MacCulloch cites several interesting instances - baptisms among the American Indian tribes, among the Egyptians and Hindus at the Malay Archipelago, and various other pre-Christian European rites,<sup>2</sup> but it is doubtful whether much can be made of these rather far-fetched analogies. Nor should too much stress be laid upon the Hellenistic Mystery religions with their initiatory baptismal ceremonies, embodying the idea of regeneration, since it is by no means certain at what point of time these

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1. Bousset: Die Religion des Judentums, p.231, thinks that the baptism of the Essenes had a sacramental character. The evidence is too meagre to warrant such a conclusion.

2. E.R.E., vol.ii, pp.367ff.

cults were established and extended their influence.<sup>1</sup> With the contemporary Jewish purifications as a background, and a little originality on John's part, it is not difficult to see how he devised his baptism.

It has already been pointed out how even in O.T. times a step had been taken towards the idea that baptism cleanses from moral guilt. There can be no doubt that John, who was of priestly descent, would be acquainted with the O.T. Scriptures. Both Ezek.36:25, 'I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean', and Ps.51:7, 'Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow', may have powerfully impressed him, and his baptism was probably inspired by either of these passages or by both. According to the former, John's baptism would be regarded by him as the direct fulfilment of the prophecy that God would cleanse the Israelites from all their idols and their sin. According to the latter, it would be regarded as the answer to the prayer of the Psalmist,

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1. The point will be taken in section (d) of this chapter. The baptismal rite employed in the Mystery cult of Mithra, may be noted here. "The purification by water washed away sin and was thus a kind of adult baptism, while the later stages of sealing the candidate's forehead as the mark of his initiation to the grade of 'soldier' was compared by Tertullian to the rite of confirmation." MacCulloch: art.cit., p.374. Worthy of note, too, is the curious ritual of the Taurobolium, or baptism in bull's blood. The candidate sat in a trench underneath an open grating on which a bull was sacrificed. The blood gushed all over him and the candidate was declared to be 'reborn into eternity'. See further, MacCulloch: art.cit., p.374.

'Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity'. It would appear, then, that the Baptist, convinced as he was of an inner call, linked up these Scriptural passages with the prevalent Jewish lustrations in a brilliant and practical way, by instituting a baptism similar, to a certain extent, but by no means entirely similar, to the latter - a baptism whose popularity would be greatly increased by reflection upon the former. Opinions will differ as to why John chose the Jordan as one of the theatres of his activity. Attempts have been made to explain this as due to Ezekiel 47 from which it might appear that the water of Jordan would be regarded as suitable for baptism. It is much more likely, however, that John's action may be wholly explained by the daring originality of his outlook. It mattered little to him where and how the rite was performed, so long as it achieved its purpose. Indeed, the very novelty of the procedure must have powerfully attracted the popular imagination and this factor, too, may have weighed with John in giving his rite an unusual and a striking aspect. It seems to be quite unnecessary to go beyond these considerations to account for the origin of John's baptism. Why go in search of remote analogies, and deny the Baptist an originality which his rite, as will immediately be seen, so patently exemplified?

(c) The Method of John's Baptism.

The originality of John's baptism appears firstly in the method of its execution. The Gospels indicate that the method employed was as follows. Those about to be baptised descended into the Jordan (implied at Mk.1:10, Matt.3:16), and after a time, (how long is not stated), came up out of the river on the completion of the ceremony. John himself performed the actual baptising. (Mk.1:14, 5, 8,9; Matt.3:6,11,13,14,16; Lk.3:7,16,21, 7:30; Jn.1:26,28, 33, 3:22, 4:2). It is not clear whether the baptism involved complete or partial immersion, or whether it involved a sprinkling or washing of the body. Christian art represented John as pouring a shell-full of water over the head of Jesus at his baptism, but this is probably due to the later Christian practice. Almost certainly, in the Jordan, at least, immersion was the rule. In the Mandaean literature John is given to say, "I throw men into the Jordan like sheep before their shepherds, and I make the water flow over them with my staff, and I utter the name of Life over them."<sup>1</sup> At Aenon near to Salim, and at other theatres of John's activity, the method may have varied to suit the water-supply, and a sprinkling may have sufficed,

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1. Ginza, Lidzb., p.192, 2ff. (= G.R.v.191.)

but it is difficult to see how John himself could have performed this latter type of baptism in view of the enormous crowds who flocked to his rite. The fact that he did baptise in person, however, as the evidence indubitably suggests, together with the consideration that immersion was almost certainly employed, gives his baptism a distinct and striking originality, since such a procedure cannot be paralleled either in the O.T. purifications or in the baptisms of the Essenes, as far as can be judged. In all of these the baptised performed the ceremony himself, and in the Jewish proselyte baptism the same rule held good. The last-mentioned, it is true, was performed in the presence of two or three witnesses, but these witnesses took no active part in the lustration itself. In view of the novelty of John's practice, Cremer<sup>1</sup> may perhaps be right in suggesting that ὁ βαπτίζων was applied to John speedily crystallised into the title 'Baptist', because whereas in other baptismal sects everybody performed the ablutions on himself, John himself performed them on those whom he baptised. Finally, there is no evidence that John's baptism was repeated. The impression which the Evangelists and Josephus convey is that it was permissible only once in each individual case.

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1. Op.cit., p.127; cf. Kittel: Theolog.Wört.zum N.T., vol.i, p.544.

Summarising: There existed a sharp contrast between John's baptism and all other contemporary baptisms - the latter with their cramping restrictions regarding the quality of water, (spring-water), and the place for the performance of the rite, (rarely in the open), with their frequent repetition and their aspersion or washing of the body, the former, with its daring rejection of all these forms which tended to exalt the rite itself at the expense of its significance. Even in externals, John's baptism exhibited a very striking originality!

(d) The Significance of John's Baptism.

It was in the significance of John's baptism, however, that the Baptist's greatest originality appears to have lain.

The parallel passages in the Synoptics dealing with the contrast between John's baptism and the baptism which was to follow his may first be considered. Mark has:

'I indeed have baptised you with water .... but he shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'<sup>1</sup> Matthew and Luke,

'I indeed baptise you with water .... but he shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.'<sup>2</sup> All three

Evangelists represent John as contrasting his water baptism with a coming Spirit-baptism, but Matthew and Luke add

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1. 1:18.

2. Matt.3:11 = Lk.3:16.

very significantly that the coming baptism was to be accompanied with fire. There can be no doubt that the reference to fire is original. Not only do the words belong to the Q tradition, but it is almost incredible that they would have been invented, inasmuch as the later Christian baptism was not accompanied by fire. While this is clear, it is not so certain whether the other element in the coming baptism - the Holy Spirit - can be safely regarded as an original utterance of the Baptist. It is true that the idea of the Spirit is not unfamiliar in the O.T., but nowhere does the set expression - the Holy Spirit - appear. For the conception of the pouring out of the Spirit, presumably in baptism, Joel is commonly cited as a possible influence on John's thought, 'And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions; and also upon the servants and upon the handmaidens in these days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come.'<sup>1</sup> It would be rash to

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1. Joel: 2:28-31.



exclude the possibility of the Baptist's acquaintance with this passage and of its influence in forming his thought. The point, rather, is in what way the words of Joel were likely to have been understood by John. If the chapter is consulted, it is plain that 2:21-27 form one distinct section describing the blessings which Zion will inherit at the end of time, and that the verses quoted, 2: 28-31, (also v.32), form another distinct section, announcing the fate of the ungodly. The visions and prophecies are to be understood in no good sense, but rather as denoting the upsetting of the mind and all manner of confusion, an interpretation which is supported by the reference to blood, fire, pillars of smoke, darkness. In fact the passage is parallel to Isaiah 4:4, 'When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion .... by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning', to Isaiah 57:13, 'When thou criest, let thy companies deliver thee .... but the wind shall carry them away', to Isaiah 41:16, 'Thou shalt fan them and the wind shall carry them away', and finally, to Psalm 1:4, 'The wicked are like the chaff which the wind driveth away .... the wicked shall not stand in the judgment.'

What the Baptist really envisaged, therefore, was not all a baptism with Holy Spirit, but a baptism with spirit or

wind, (the word πνεύματι in our texts may be original in this sense, minus the adjective ῥύϊω ), a scorching wind which would thoroughly fan and sift, and the fire which the Baptist referred to was not by any means the fire of enthusiasm associated with the Spirit, but the consuming fire of which Malachi speaks, 'For behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven', 4:1. 'Who shall stand when he appeareth, for he is like a refiner's fire and fuller's soap?', 3:2. This interpretation fits in admirably with the Baptist's own reference to the chaff and to the threshing-floor and with his cry, 'Flee from the wrath to come!' On the other hand, Mark's reference to the Holy Spirit, and the Matthaean and Lucan conflation of Holy Spirit and fire, shew how John's message was early misunderstood and spiritualised in Christian circles.

The original contrast, then, as John pronounced it, was between his own baptism, involving the milder element, water, and a coming baptism to be accompanied by the more searing elements, wind and fire. What exactly this coming baptism was to be, and by whom it was to be performed, need not be discussed at present.<sup>1</sup> Rather, the questions may be asked: Did participation in John's baptism secure safety from the fire and wind baptism? Was John's baptism for bodily purification only, or had it a solely moral signifi-

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1. Cf. Chapter V, p.260ff.

cance? Was John's baptism simply a practical means of gathering the people together to take an oath to repent in view of the nearness of the fire-baptism, and thus symbolical of the purity of life he demanded, and devoid of sacramental efficacy? To these questions no absolutely clear and unequivocal answer is given in the Gospels, but yet, it is possible, perhaps, to get fairly near the mark, by examining the evidence our sources afford.

According to the Gospels, John's baptism had quite unmistakably a certain moral significance. According to Mark, 'John appeared in the wilderness ... he who baptised and preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out to him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were baptised in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.'<sup>1</sup> According to Luke, 'John came .... preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.'<sup>2</sup> According to Matthew, 'Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and the country round about Jordan and were baptised of him in the Jordan confessing their sins.'<sup>3</sup> Matthew also represents John as saying, 'I baptise you with water unto repentance'.<sup>4</sup> Before the genuineness and the meaning of these passages is examined, it will be of interest to compare the general impression

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1. 1:4.

3. 3:5,6.

2. 3:3.

4. 3:11.

which they convey, with the totally different estimate of Josephus.<sup>1</sup>

There are three striking differences in the historian's account. First, the baptism of John is dissociated from eschatological considerations. This is purely negative, however, and quite in line with the historian's customary silence on such matters. Second, it would appear that Josephus indicates that John extended his baptism first to Jews, who had already improved their lives by virtue and piety, and that the baptism was the crowning point of righteousness. Only when the people in general flocked to him did Herod grow suspicious. "The statement thus implies that the virtuous rather than the sinful were invited to baptism, which was only open to those who had already purified their souls by righteousness."<sup>2</sup> This account of John's baptism cannot be reconciled with the Gospel account, unless it be referred to an earlier stage of John's activity during which his baptism was so constituted. Had this been the case, however, it is very difficult to understand why, within a few years, his baptism underwent so radical a change. Third, according to Josephus, the baptism of John was for bodily purification only, and in itself involved no question of cleansing from moral guilt. No recourse can be had to Eisler's suggestion that

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1. Cf. Chapter I, p.14-15.

2. Jackson & Lake: The Beginnings of Christianity, vol.i, p.103.

a Christian copyist has been at work on the passage "who, unwilling to admit that John's baptism was connected with repentance and the forgiveness of sins, deliberately altered the significance of the same by transposing the members of the adversative clauses, 'not if', and 'but for'."<sup>1</sup> If a Christian copyist deliberately altered the text of Josephus in the manner described, it is hard to imagine how a similar phrase, 'a baptism for the remission of sins', could have been inserted in the Gospel accounts, or, if it were originally there, how it could have been left standing! Accordingly, it must be admitted that on the two last-mentioned points, the Gospel evidence and the evidence of Josephus are in direct contradiction.

Perhaps the true solution of the difficulty lies along the following lines. One feels that the way in which Josephus presents his estimate of John's baptism suggests quite definitely that he is contradicting something. Can this be the Gospel records? There is a reasonable possibility that it can. The historian, in fact, finding it stated therein that John's baptism was connected with repentance and the forgiveness of sins, may have been struck by the contrast between this and the purificatory rites which had hitherto obtained. Reflecting further upon the fact that Christian baptism had a moral

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1. Cf. Chapter I, p. 16.

significance, he may very possibly have concluded that the ascription of the same to John's baptism had been due to a confusion between John's baptism and Christian baptism.<sup>1</sup> He prefers therefore to represent John's baptism as being similar to the rites of contemporary Judaism, and thus intimates, that, in reality, it was extended only to a select body of Jews, and that it was not for the remission of sins, but solely for the purification of the body. Such an account of things would offend nobody - neither his Christian readers, nor his patrons, and at the same time, it would afford Josephus an excellent opportunity to air his superior knowledge on Jewish sects - a subject in which he always displays the most intense interest. A little reflection, however, shews how unlikely the account of Josephus really is. The Gospel tradition that John's baptism had a certain moral significance is almost certainly correct, because that tradition would never have been invented by Christians. The tendency would have been to stress the difference between John's baptism and Christian

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1. Cf. Naber: Mnemosyne Zeitschrift, New Series, vol.xiii, 1885, p.281. The only objection to the view that Josephus had in mind Christian baptism at this point is the expression, "the remission of certain sins". This does not seem to suit Christian baptism which was for the forgiveness of all sins. The earliest stages of Christian baptism are, however, not clear, and there may have been some such restriction at first. Otherwise, it may be supposed that Josephus is contrasting John's baptism with certain Mystery Cults.

baptism, had the former not quite indisputably been connected with moral issues. The account of Josephus appears, therefore, to be less acceptable than the Gospel tradition. The latter is primitive: the former merely the personal opinion of the historian.

The point just made, that John's baptism would not have been given a certain moral significance by the Evangelists, had it not actually possessed this significance, leads directly to a discussion of the phrases describing the rite and to an estimation of their genuineness and their meaning. It is noteworthy that Mark<sup>1</sup> and Luke<sup>2</sup> state that the baptism was connected with 'forgiveness of sins'. It is usually assumed that these words are additional, reflecting the significance of Christian baptism. John's baptism has been given, it is held, an incorrect significance through the attempt to draw him into Christian circles. Hence the words should be deleted as not primitive.<sup>3</sup> At first sight, this suggestion is attractive. The probability that Christian influence has attributed to John the words 'He will baptise you with Holy Spirit' has already been observed. But, it may well be asked, is it probable that John's baptism would have been fictitiously represented as connected directly or indirectly with the forgiveness of sins, in

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1. 1:4.

2. 3:3.

3. Cf. Brandt: Die jüdischen Baptismen, p.70.

view of the sinlessness of Jesus, and the fact that he had been baptised by John? The two ideas clash quite unmistakably, and raise very acute difficulties. It was not the intention of the Evangelists to raise any such difficulties for their readers, but that the difficulty was early felt is clear from the apologetic addition of Matthew in his account of the baptism of Jesus<sup>1</sup> and from his omission of the phrase, 'for the forgiveness of sins', in describing John's rite. In view of this, it is probable that the phrase should be regarded not as a later insertion but as primitive, and hence that John's baptism was connected in some way with the remission of sins.

John's baptism is further described as a 'baptism of repentance', ( βάπτισμα μετανοίας ).<sup>2</sup> It is not clear in what way the phrase is to be understood. It is possible to take the genitive epexegetically as indicating that the fruit of baptism was repentance, or to take the genitive as equivalent to 'unto repentance', ( εἰς μετάνοιαν ) i.e. a baptism with a view to repentance, or a baptism whose demand was repentance. The latter interpretation is better because it is supported by Matthew, who uses once the phrase εἰς μετάνοιαν .<sup>3</sup> Now there is good evidence that the word μετάνοια was not always used by ancient writers

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1. Cf. section B of this chapter.

2. Mk. 1:4.

3. 3:11.



exactly in our sense of 'repentance' = a 'change of mind', but in the fuller sense of a 'change of life', (Lebenswandel). A change of life is of course preceded by a change of mind, but there is a transference of the emphasis. It is probable, then, that John's baptism was one whose demand was a change of life. This demand was necessary in view of the coming fire-baptism, and only by evincing such a change of life could the baptised hope to secure remission of sins and to pass unscathed through the hour of trial. This interpretation links up admirably with the ever-repeated emphasis of the Baptist on the necessity of repentance in his preaching.<sup>1</sup> Indeed it is quite remarkable how little the Baptist has to say about the rite itself, and how much more about moral requirements. It seems certain that he ascribed to his baptism no sacramental efficacy.<sup>2</sup> The forgiveness of sins was conditional not on acceptance of the baptism alone, but on change of life, as both the moral emphasis in John's ministry, and the absence of any set formula for the baptism imply. It does not seem, therefore, that Otto is wholly justified in ascribing to John "a water sacrament, which, with its magical dynamic was to provide a charm against the menace of the eschatological order."<sup>3</sup> Rather, it would appear that the rite was

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1. Cf. Chapter V, p.276ff.

2. Cf. J.V.Bartlet: E.R.E., vol.ii, p.375.

3. The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man, p.80.

employed by John simply as a means to gather the people together to elicit from them what Bultmann has called an 'eschatological oath'<sup>1</sup> to change their lives because of the nearness of the end, and to renew their covenant with God. Powerfully stirred by the Baptist's words, the people confessed their sins and, as a seal that their confession was genuine, and that they were determined to bring forth fruits to prove that a change of life had taken place,<sup>2</sup> John baptised them in water which was symbolical of the purity of life which was henceforth to be theirs.

The appearance of the Baptist with a water-rite associated, be it indirectly, with moral issues was something entirely new in the history of Jewish baptisms. The idea, it is true, had already been voiced by Psalmist and Prophet, but it took the genius of a bold and original personality to work it out in a practical and impressive manner. John's baptism marked a definite step away from the legalistic restrictions of orthodox Judaism, and fore-shadowed the emphasis of Christianity on change of life.

But yet, there was another side to the picture, and in this respect Otto's words may be true. It was almost inevitable that many who flocked to John's baptism would do so more out of curiosity to see the strange phenomenon, than

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1. Jesus and the Word, p.23.

2. Lk.3:8.

with any real desire to change their lives. It may have been that John's scathing words struck terror into their souls, and that they accepted his baptism hoping that the rite itself would wash out their past sins, and deliver them from the fire-baptism. Certainly they had no warrant for such a hope from the Baptist himself, but it would be surprising if there did not linger in the minds of the people certain traces of the old animistic ideas as to the magical cleansing properties of water. Superstitions are hard to eradicate and it is by no means improbable that the rumour went round that on the Jordan, and elsewhere, there worked one who offered a baptism which would remit sins and provide a means of escape from the wrath to come. It is not surprising, if this were so, that 'Jerusalem and all the land of Judea and all the country round Jordan' flocked to participate in a rite which was said to possess this virtue. In fact, the extreme popularity of the baptism almost suggests in itself that this was what actually happened. This unexpected, but only too natural development, had, it would seem, a very profound influence on the relations of Jesus and John, and will come up for further discussion in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup> Meantime, it is to be re-emphasised that such a conception was

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1. Chapter VI.

apparently entirely foreign to the Baptist himself. The evidence shews that he strove to counteract it at every point by stressing the absolute necessity of a change of life, for it was his conviction that by this alone would the baptised find security from the fire and wind baptism, and be gathered as wheat into the garner.

(e) John's Baptism and Christian Baptism.

It is desirable to continue this exposition of John's baptism one step further and to consider what light, if any, John's practice throws upon the rite of Christian baptism. By the middle of the first century the latter rite had a sacramental significance. It was administered with the formula 'in the name of Jesus', was closely associated with the Holy Spirit, and was regarded as remitting sins and as bringing its participants into union with Christ. The explanation of Christian baptism has always been a difficult problem, as the very diversity of views as to its origin shews.

There are three possible explanations of the origin of Christian baptism. (a) The traditional view is that baptism was instituted by Christ in his parting address to his disciples<sup>1</sup> and the rite was a direct continuation of the practice of Jesus during his life-time. (b) Baptism was adopted

1. Matt. 28:19, 'Go ye unto all the world and make disciples of all the Gentiles, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.'

on the analogy of the water-rites of the Hellenistic Mystery Religions. (c) Baptism was inherited by the early Christians from Judaism, and in particular, from the rite of John the Baptist, who used the Jewish lustrations in a new and more acceptable way.

(a) The traditional view is open to serious objection on the ground of textual, historical, and literary criticism. In certain texts of the Gospels used by Eusebius and Justin Martyr, the commission to baptise did not appear. The former either omits the verse or gives it in the form, 'Go you into all the world and make disciples of all the Gentiles in my name.' Only four times out of twenty-one does the traditional rendering appear, and these instances are confined to his later writings. The latter, in describing the regeneration of Christian converts in connection with baptism, invokes not Matt. 28:19 as justifying the practice, but falls back upon Isaiah and Apostolic tradition.<sup>1</sup> This suggests that Justin was unacquainted with the traditional text. It is significant, moreover, that in the *Didache* the rite is not clearly described as an injunction given by Jesus himself, e.g. as prayer is.<sup>2</sup> Now it cannot be doubted that had the ecclesiastical formula been original to Matthew, the tendency of later writers

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1. *Apologia*, i, 61.

2. vii: 1-4.

would have been not to displace it, but to re-emphasise it. Intrinsic probability is therefore against the verse being primitive.<sup>1</sup> On literary grounds, the silence of Mark, Q, and Luke is extremely significant. It is generally agreed that the Gospel of Mark was left unfinished at 16:8, and that 16:9-20, (the Longer Ending), is based upon the Lucan writings supplemented by Matthew and oral tradition. No weight can therefore be laid upon the references to baptism in this section, reflecting as it does, the later ecclesiastical point of view. As for Luke, who had undoubtedly an excellent opportunity to mention the commission to baptise in his account of the parting words of Christ at 24:47, it must be supposed either that he has intentionally suppressed it, or that he was not acquainted with any such tradition. As there is no satisfactory argument in favour of the former view, it would seem that, failing any third alternative, the latter view is correct. Finally, on historical grounds, the use of the Triune formula at Matt. 28:19 is significant - a formula which appears nowhere else in the N.T., and which conflicts with the evidence of Acts, according to which the earliest form of baptism was 'in the name of the Lord' alone. The

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1. Cf. Conybeare: Hibbert Journal, i, 1902, pp.102-108; Ruggenbach: Der trinitarische Taufbefehl, Beiträge zur Ford. der chr. Theol., i, 1903.

cumulative evidence thus presented makes it practically certain that the tradition embodied in Matt. 28:19 is late and non-historical and the argument is made all the more decisive by the fact that the references in the Fourth Gospel to Jesus and his disciples baptising are, as already pointed out, almost certainly fictitious. Christian baptism, therefore, can scarcely be explained as a continuation of the practice of Jesus and directly enjoined by our Lord in his parting words.

(b) Failing the traditional explanation, is it possible to trace the origin of Christian baptism to the water-rites of the Hellenistic Mystery Religions? It cannot be denied that in these rites, especially in the cult of Isis, and the cult of Mithra, (Taurobolium), there are many points of similarity with the Christian rite, the outstanding one being their sacramental character, whereby the sins of the candidate were washed away, and he was thus prepared for union with the divinity of the cult.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, so close was the resemblance that the Early Fathers did not hesitate to brand these cults as diabolical imitations of the Christian sacraments. According to Cumont, however, these rites were already in existence in Persia and Greece at the time of the beginning of Christianity,<sup>2</sup>

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1. For the cult of Isis, cf. Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*, xi; for the cult of Mithra, cf. Prudentius: *Peristephanes*, x, ll.101ff.
  2. *The Mysteries of Mithra*, 1903, pp.155ff.

and the possibility remains that the Early Fathers were mistaken in their judgment, and that, in reality, the Christian rite was influenced by the pagan. It would be rash, however, to press this opinion too far. The point is well taken by Macgregor and Purdy, "As a great deal has been made of the effect of these Oriental Mysteries upon Gentile Christianity, it is important to remember that, though in Egypt and the Asiatic provinces, they had long flourished in the West Mediterranean, it was only after Christianity had obtained a firm foothold that the Mysteries began to have a vogue. Unjustifiable deductions concerning the origin of Christian doctrine and practice have often been made from evidence which is too late for the purpose."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the evidence for union with the divinity and regeneration in the ceremony of Taurobolium dates from as late as 376 A.D.,<sup>2</sup> while the description of the cult of Isis appears in a book dating from the second half of the second century A.D.. It is to be presumed, of course, that this evidence points to the existence of the ceremony at a much earlier date, but it is impossible to say definitely at what point of time the rites began to exert their influence on the thought and practice of the Early Church, nor is it quite certain that there was a Mystery rite exactly

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1. Jew and Greek: Tutors unto Christ, p.279. Acknowledgment is due to this work in particular for this section.
  2. C.I.L., 6, 510.



parallel to the Christian rite. There is, for instance, no evidence that in any of the pagan Mysteries, the formula 'in the name of' was used. It has to be borne in mind, too, that nearly all ancient religions gradually developed sacramental practices, and that the rites of the Mysteries and Christianity may represent a quite independent growth, as indeed the difference in their thought and content, as distinct from their outward form, would seem to imply. It would be likely, however, that, as Christianity and Mithraism came in the second century to be rival faiths, each would borrow from the other to a greater or lesser extent. On the whole, therefore, it seems doubtful whether the Mysteries had any influence on the origin of Christian baptism, at least, although it is possible that the development of the Christian practice was unconsciously, though perfectly naturally, influenced by the rites of its competitors, which were products of roughly the same age.

(c) If both the traditional view, and the theory of Graeco-Oriental influence are set aside, it would seem that the Christian Sacrament was in some way inspired by the baptism of John. This appears to be the most probable standpoint, although, it, too, is not without its difficulty. Perhaps the development took place in the following stages. The first stage was Pentecost. Whether assent is given to

the remarkable series of events in all their details which took place on that day does not materially matter. The point is that in the assembled company a certain change took place which was regarded as due to the pouring out of or the baptising with the Holy Spirit according to the promise of Jesus. This Spirit-baptism was thought of as replacing the water-baptism of John, and in the exuberance of this experience, both the prophecy of Joel, and the baptism of John were spiritualised. The former was regarded as pointing forward to a baptism with the Spirit which would kindle with enthusiasm, whereas, in reality, Joel meant the spirit of Judgment, and the latter was represented as contrasting his water-baptism with a baptism with Holy Spirit, whereas, in reality, John spoke of the scorching wind of destruction, Acts 2:1-21. The same point of view appears in the story of Cornelius, both in the direct narrative, Acts 10:1-46, and in Peter's report of it, Acts 11. According to Acts 10:44, 'While Peter yet spake these words the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision, which believed, were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.' In Acts 11:17, Peter, reporting the matter,

states, 'Forasmuch, then, as God gave them (the Gentiles) the like gift as he did unto us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God?' This narrative, like that of Pentecost, shews that in the earliest stage a general Spirit-baptism was regarded as having taken the place of John's water-baptism, and at the same time points forward to the second stage in the development of the Christian rite. The second stage took place with the growth of ecclesiastical consciousness in the early Christian community. One of the conditions of membership in this community was the gift of the Holy Spirit, but as the narrative of Cornelius shews, the idea of a promiscuous pouring out of the Spirit on the Gentiles, and hence of their automatic membership in the Christian community, was thought to be objectionable. It was, in fact, deemed advisable to have some concrete element which might more definitely convey the gift of the Spirit, and it would be strange if reflection on John's baptism did not suggest the element of water. But this was not enough. With a view to even greater precision, it was held that the water-baptism did not convey the Spirit, unless the formula, 'in the name of Jesus', were used. As there is no evidence that John used any formula at his baptism, it would seem that the words, 'in the name of', were taken over from the colloquial usage

of the time. "The expression was used in solemn or formal connexions, and with special reference to proprietorship.

Thus a payment is made εἰς ὄνομα τινός , into so-and-so an account: a petition is presented εἰς τό τοῦ βασιλέως ὄνομα to the King's person, and still more significantly in one connection, soldiers swear 'in the King's name'.<sup>1</sup>

There is no need to assume that the expression was understood to begin with, at least, in the pregnant sense of identification between the baptised and the Lord Jesus, i.e. as union with Christ. The phrase is merely asserting in a solemn way that the individuals were baptised as Christians, and is parallel to such statements as, 'We who are baptised into Christ Jesus', (Rom.6:3), and, 'As many of you as were baptised into Christ', (Gal.3:27). At this stage baptism was further regarded as remitting sins - an idea, perhaps, taken over directly from the rite of John the Baptist, which almost certainly came to have this significance in popular estimate. The second stage is reflected, then, in Acts 2:37-41, a passage which is clearly editorial, inasmuch as it is hard to see how the viewpoint here expressed, viz. that baptism in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins conveys the Holy Spirit, fits in with the earlier part of the chapter, accord-

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1. Bartlet: E.R.E., vol.ii, p.377.

ing to which a general Spirit-baptism had replaced entirely the water-baptism of John. The same may be said of Acts 10:47-48, (an addendum to the Cornelius story), for what would have been the point of baptising the Gentiles since, according to the previous verses, they had already received the Holy Spirit? Clearly the editor is making a somewhat clumsy ex post facto attempt to join up the earlier and the more advanced views, by representing the water-baptism as clinching the gift of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, at Acts 19:1-7, the point of view expressed is that baptism 'in the name of the Lord' conveys the Holy Spirit, although here, perhaps, more than usual emphasis is laid upon the formula, and at Acts 9:17ff, Saul receives his sight, and is filled with the Holy Ghost, as a result of his baptism by Ananias. In the case of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip, Acts 8:36-39, it is not clearly stated that baptism conveyed the Holy Spirit. 'When they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip that the eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing.' It does not, however, demand too great a stretch of the imagination to see that the impartation of the Spirit is, in reality, implied. In any case, it is unnecessary to suppose that a well-known fact would require particular mention on each occasion.- It is

not mentioned at Acts 16:15, (Lydia's baptism), 16:33, (the gaoler's baptism), 18:8, (Crispus' baptism), and Paul, in his description of his conversion at 23:16 is equally silent, although, thanks to the parallel account at 9:17ff., the implication clearly is that the gift of the Spirit at baptism was regarded as an established fact, requiring no specific mention on every occasion. It seems doubtful, therefore, whether Jackson and Lake are correct in their assertion that the silence as to the impartation of the Spirit in these passages points to a time when Christian water-baptism was entirely dissociated from the gift of the Spirit, and hence that the origin of the rite is to be sought in Greek as distinct from Jewish circles.<sup>1</sup> The point of view in these passages is actually in substantial agreement with Pauline thought - that the Holy Spirit was the gift of baptism in the name of the Lord. The third stage in the development of the rite, which may, however, be no more than a variation of the second, appears in the narrative of the baptisms in Samaria by the Seven, Acts 8: 8-17. The point of this narrative is to shew that in certain cases, the Holy Spirit was not given directly by baptism, but only after the laying on of hands by the Apostles. The parenthesis in verse 16 - 'For as yet the

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1. The Beginnings of Christianity, i, pp.341ff.

Holy Spirit was fallen upon none of them'— shews, however, that the writer of these words is aware that the sequence of events described here is contrary to the usual one. The narrative is best regarded as a proof-illustration in justifying special caution as to the full admission of certain Gentiles into the Christian community.<sup>1</sup> The fourth stage, and the last which is of interest here, is the stress laid by Paul upon the fact that baptism brings about union between the baptised and Christ.<sup>2</sup> It may be, that in this conception, Paul was influenced by the rites of the Mystery religions, and that Christian baptism came to be coloured by the parallel ideas in these cults. Certainly Paul would not have been slow to employ such a conception, if thereby, he had found a point of contact with his hearers. On the whole, however, it is unnecessary to believe that this was the case. As Weinel puts it, "Paul's doctrine of the Spirit of Christ is not an imitation of Mystery doctrine, but inmost personal experience metaphysically interpreted after the manner of his time."<sup>3</sup>

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1. As there is no trace of redaction in this passage, it is possible that the procedure adopted here was merely a variation of the second stage employed in difficult and dangerous cases, (e.g. 'Simon used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria', Acts, 8:9). It does not, however, go back beyond the second stage, as the parenthesis shews, and no more points to a Greek origin of baptism than the examples already noted.
  2. Col. 2:12.
  3. Cited by Macgregor and Purdy: Jew and Greek: Tutors unto Christ, p.290.

It would appear, then, that the Christian rite of baptism is to be explained neither by the traditional view nor by pagan analogies, but to a lesser extent by the tendency of all religions to develop sacramental ideas, and to a greater extent by the baptism of John the Baptist.

## B.

### The Baptism of Jesus.

Whatever else in the Gospel narrative may be open to doubt, there seems to be nothing more certain than the fact that Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist. The historicity of the event has been questioned only by a few critics and their arguments are quite unconvincing.<sup>1</sup> The baptism was not mythical, but historical, inasmuch as such a narrative would never have been invented by the compilers of the Gospels. No one of them would have dreamed of representing the sinless Jesus as having submitted himself to a baptism whose demand was change of life, had not our Lord actually done so, and had not the tradition been very firmly established. Accordingly, the baptism of Jesus by John may be regarded with perfect confidence as an established historical fact.

It is one thing, however, to accept the fact, but quite another to accept the details of it as presented in the

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1. Notably by E. Meyer: Ursprung u. Anfänge des Christentums, ii, p.406, note 3.



Gospels and elsewhere. So important an event was this in the eyes of the Church, so strangely would it seize the popular imagination, that it would provide an excellent field, on the one hand, for cultivation along lines in accord with the varying theologies and Christologies of the day, and on the other, for embellishment with picturesque borders. Both tendencies already appear in the Gospels, while the latter is specially pronounced, as might be expected, in the apocryphal literature. It is necessary, therefore, to examine critically the passages relating to the baptism of Jesus, in order to determine as precisely as possible what actually transpired at that moment. The result will be to throw considerable light upon the significance of John the Baptist.

Mark's account of the baptism is as follows, 'And it came to pass in these days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised of John in the Jordan, and straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens rent asunder, and the Spirit as a dove descending upon him; and a voice came out of the heavens, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.'<sup>1</sup> The most remarkable feature of this narrative is its brevity. No reasons are given to show how Jesus knew of John's whereabouts, or why

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1. Mk. 1:9-11.

he suffered himself to be baptised by John. The narrative does not follow naturally on what precedes, because there the Coming One is conceived of as giving the Holy Spirit, and here Jesus receives the Holy Spirit. Immediately after the baptism, the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness. The fact is, one gets the impression that the whole incident was not altogether pleasing to the Evangelist, and that he was at pains to pass over it as quickly as possible. Suppress it, he could not, because the tradition was too firmly rooted. The next best course was to dismiss it shortly.

The Evangelist conceives the vision of the Spirit, which descended as a dove, as vouchsafed to Jesus only. Clearly the subject of  $\epsilon\overset{3}{\iota}\delta\epsilon$ , (he saw), is Jesus, not John the Baptist, as Bultmann maintains,<sup>1</sup> which would involve a very harsh and unnatural grammatical construction. It is otherwise, however, with the voice. The Evangelist clearly wishes to indicate that this was heard not only by Jesus, but by the Baptist and the people in general. Hence the change to  $\epsilon\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron$ , (there came a voice), instead of, 'Jesus heard a voice'. The theological point of view of the account is thus Adoptionist and points to its fairly early origin.

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1. Forsch.zur Religion und Literatur, N.F., xii, 1921, p.152.

Passing to Matthew, we read, 'Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan unto John to be baptised of him. But John would have hindered him saying, I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me? But Jesus answered, saying unto him, Suffer it now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffereth him. And Jesus, when he was baptised, went up straightway from the water, and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming upon him: and, lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.'<sup>1</sup> The impression conveyed by this account is that Matthew knew the Marcan version, and is deliberately altering it to suit his own pre-conceived Christological ideas. First, it is explained that the baptism of Jesus was due to the eternal purposes of God. He came 'to be baptised'. Second, he composes a conversation between John and Jesus, the contents of which are further designed to remove the objectionable idea of the sinless Jesus being baptised unto the remission of sins. This was 'to fulfil all righteousness.' Third, both the vision and the voice are represented as objective. 'This is my beloved Son' replaces 'Thou art my beloved Son.' The result of these changes is to remove

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1. Matt. 3:13-17.

any idea of subordination of Jesus to John, and at the same time to establish the fact that the baptism of Jesus was simply a public proclamation of his Messiahship, since Jesus, in Matthew's view, was Messiah owing to his supernatural birth.

Turning to Luke, 'It came to pass when all the people were baptised and Jesus was baptised and praying, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon him, and a voice came from the heavens, Thou art my beloved Son: in thee I am well pleased.'<sup>1</sup> This account is much nearer Mark than Matthew, yet the Evangelist has contrived to give it a different point of view. First, the baptism is mentioned only in passing, as one among many. No special attention is drawn to Jesus presenting himself individually for the rite. Consequently the objection to his doing so appears less grave. Second, the opening of the heavens is made to follow upon the prayer of Jesus, rather than upon the rite of John. In this way, the idea of subordination to the Baptist is subtly removed. Third, the proceedings are conceived of objectively - as, in Matthew, a public proclamation of the Messiahship of Jesus. A very interesting variation, however, appears in the  $\delta$  text.<sup>2</sup> Instead of,

1. Lk. 3:21-22.

2. Represented by D a b c ff<sub>2</sub> l r and by Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hilary, Lactantius, and Augustine.

'In thee I am well pleased', the text is, 'This day I have begotten thee.' Goguel is surely right in his contention that there is a very good case for the latter reading.<sup>1</sup> It is much more natural to suppose that the a reading was substituted under the influence of Christological pre-occupations than that the δ reading was invented through the tendency to conform quotations from the O.T. to their exact original content. In other words, the Adoptianist idea contained in the δ reading would have been more readily discarded, than an attempt made to bring the second half of the quotation into line with Psalm 2:7. It is therefore very probable that the δ reading is original, and even possible that the original text of Mark contained these very words.

The Fourth Evangelist does not give a direct account of the baptism of Jesus by John, but it is probable that he knew of it. One of the aims of the Fourth Evangelist is to contrast the Greater and the Lesser Lights. How could he have been convincing if he had represented the Greater as being baptised by the Lesser? Instead of directly telling the story of the baptism, he contents himself with putting on John's lips these words, 'I beheld the Spirit descending as a dove from the heavens, and it

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1. Jean-Baptiste: pp.154ff.; cf. Harnack: The Sayings of Jesus, pp.235ff.

abode with him', but for the Fourth Evangelist this was not a sign of the Messiahship of Jesus, but simply that this was He who would baptise in Holy Spirit, Jn.1:33. The centre of gravity has been displaced from the baptism itself to the Holy Spirit which accompanied baptism. The baptism was of no significance for the Fourth Evangelist, except, perhaps, as revealing to Israel in greater fulness the glory of the Greater Light, Jn.1:31. The Greater Light had been in existence before the beginning of the world, Jn.1:1, and had been since then divine, Jn.1:1. There is no question here of the Fourth Evangelist deliberately correcting the Synoptic tradition or of his omitting all reference to the baptism because the story had already been told. He eliminates it, and leaves only an echo partly because it is wholly irreconcilable with his theology of the Word Incarnate, and partly because of his desire to efface the Lesser before the Greater Light.

In the extra-canonical literature, the baptism of Jesus is variously conceived. In the Ebionite Gospel,<sup>1</sup> the following account appears, 'After the people were baptised, Jesus came also and was baptised by John: and as he came up from the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Holy Ghost, in the likeness of a dove that descended and

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1. Cf. chapter I, p.41.

entered into him: and a voice from heaven, saying: Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased: and again: This day have I begotten thee. And straightway there shone about the place a great light. Which, when John saw, he saith unto him, Who art thou? And again a voice from heaven saying: This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Then John fell down before Jesus and said: I beseech thee, Lord: baptise thou me. But he prevented him saying: Let it go, for thus it behoveth that all things should be fulfilled.<sup>1</sup> This narrative has every appearance of dependence upon Matthew, and of being secondary. This is apparent, because the author combines both the a and § readings of the words of the voice, repeats the words of the voice without adding anything new, takes over the conversation between Jesus and John, and adds the picturesque detail of the great light. Whereas, in Matthew, however, the conversation at the baptism was designed to shew that Jesus was already divine, the point of it here is to shew that at the baptism Jesus became divine by the effusion of the Holy Spirit, a fundamental tenet of Ebionite Christology. The conversation is accordingly transferred till after the baptism, and John is represented as desiring baptism from Jesus because he realised by the heavenly

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1. Cf. M.R. James: op.cit., p.9.

signs that Jesus was indeed divine. The Adoptianist Christology implicit in this narrative need not essentially point to its early origin. As Goguel puts it, "The development of Christology was not homogeneous nor rectilineal, and the circle of Jewish-Christian Ebionites remained faithful to an Adoptianist Christology to a period, when, in the general Church, this Christology had long since been abandoned."<sup>1</sup> In the Gospel according to the Hebrews, the text is, 'Behold the mother of the Lord and his brothers said to him, John Baptist baptises unto the remission of sins. Let us go and be baptised of him. Jesus said to them: Wherein have I sinned that I should go and be baptised of him - unless, haply, this very thing which I have said is ignorance.'<sup>2</sup> .... 'When the Lord was come up out of the water, the whole fountain of the Holy Spirit descended and rested upon him, and said: My Son, in all the prophets was I waiting for thee, that thou shouldst come and I might rest in thee. Thou art my rest, my first-begotten Son, that reignest for ever.'<sup>3</sup> Like the Ebionite

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1. Op.cit., p.175. Only a few critics think that this narrative is primitive. Among others, Goguel mentions Keim: The History of Jesus of Nazara, ii, pp.266-299.
  2. Jerome: Dialogue against Pelagius, iii, 2, translated by M.R.James: op.cit., p.6.
  3. Jerome: On Isaiah xi, 2, translated by M.R.James: op.cit., p.5. A.F.Findlay: Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge, pp.323ff. suggests that Jerome is quoting from the Gospel of the Nazarenes rather than from the Gospel according to the Hebrews.



account, this has also a distinctly secondary appearance, as is suggested by the omission of the all-important feature of repentance in the Baptist's rite, by the emphasis upon remission of sins, by the curious explanation of Jesus' acceptance of the baptism owing to the desire of his mother and his brothers, (perhaps a confused reminiscence of the Synoptics, where the influence is exerted in quite a different manner and only after the baptism), and by the atmosphere of theological speculation, which cannot be missed. The omission of the figure of the dove need not suggest, as has been held,<sup>1</sup> that the narrative is more primitive than that of the Synoptists. The figure has been intentionally suppressed no doubt because the author would find it hard to envisage how 'the whole fountain of the Holy Spirit' could have been contained in the simple form of a dove.! It is unnecessary, however, to examine the narrative in detail, because it contains nothing directly bearing upon John the Baptist. Suffice it to say that it is an excellent example of the work of the poetic imagination which delights in embroidering so fruitful a theme. The pious imagination was not content, however, with speculations so limited as these. Gradually fresh ideas suggested themselves - ministering angels at the baptism, thunder and lightning,

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1. E.g. by O. Holtzmann: Was Jesus Ekstatiker?, pp.35-43.

and the rolling back of the river.<sup>1</sup> There is nothing surprising in any of these developments. The first was suggested possibly by the appearance of the angel heralding the birth of Christ, as well as by the angels in the dream of Jacob, the second by Psalm 29, 'The God of glory maketh the thunder roar', and the third by Psalm 114:3, 'Jordan turned back' or by Psalm 77:17, 'The waters have seen thee, O God, the waters have seen thee, and they have trembled.' There is nothing in all this which can be regarded as primitive. Such details are no more than legendary enrichments of an otherwise plain and simple event. They illustrate, in fine, the tendency to transform the baptism into an Epiphany.

From the afore-going analysis, it would appear that the most primitive and genuine conception of the baptism of Jesus is to be found in Mark. Later additions are to be seen, (a) in the reasons alleged for Jesus' acceptance of John's baptism, (b) in the conversation between Jesus and John, and (c) in the complementary wonders of nature. The oldest tradition told quite simply that Jesus was baptised by John, and that on the completion of the rite, the skies opened, the Holy Spirit descended dove-like upon Jesus, and a voice was heard declaring his Sonship.

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1. E.g. in the Mandaean Literature.

The following points may now be made:-

(a) If the reasons inspired by apologetic endeavour are set aside, the real reason for Jesus' acceptance of John's baptism was, it would seem, his thorough-going sympathy with the Baptist's emphasis on the necessity of change of life. He had been gripped by the preacher, and fully realising that the baptism of John was symbolical of the purity of life which the latter demanded, Jesus might feel that he could best indicate his approval of the Baptist's demands by undergoing the ceremony. There was, of course, no question of direct forgiveness of sins by the rite itself, at least so far as John was concerned, so that the difficulty of the sinless Jesus submitting to a baptism for sin-forgiveness need not cause any concern. Jesus' acceptance of the baptism was an indication of his wholehearted approval of the earnest pleading of the Baptist for changed lives - an appeal which Jesus himself was to continue with greater and more winning power than his predecessor. If this is so, it is certain that Jesus' contact with John had not been a short one. It has already been indicated that there is every probability that the period of contact was much longer than the Evangelists would have us believe. In fact, the baptism of Jesus marked the culmination of a long period of friendship during which Jesus had been most pro-

foundly influenced by the thought and the personality of John. The baptism marked the seal of his gratitude, and the commencement of his own activity.<sup>1</sup>

(b) The oldest tradition relating to the baptism contained the view that by the effusion of the Holy Spirit, Jesus became the Son of God, and in view of this his work and his personality were explained. Such a Christology can scarcely be attributed to Mark, much less to Matthew, Luke, and John, and least of all to Jesus himself. The fact is, that when the early Christian community proclaimed Jesus as their Messiah, the question arose at what point of time Jesus became Messiah, and to this question different answers were probably given in different circles. Thus Paul unmistakably taught a pre-existent Christology,<sup>2</sup> whereas the Shepherd of Hermas, which, according to Dibelius, must also be regarded as reflecting early opinion, states that Jesus became the Son of God on the completion of his work on earth.<sup>3</sup> Other circles held that Jesus became Messiah at his baptism, or that his Divinity was due to his supernatural birth. It is exceedingly difficult to trace

1. This point will be supported and developed in Chapter VI.

2. Philipp.2:9 must be interpreted in the light of Philipp. 2:6,7, and Rom.1:3-4, in the light of Paul's teaching elsewhere.

3. J.d.T., p.64; Sim.V, ii, 7, ἀντὶ τούτου οὖν τοῦ ἔργου οὗ εἰργάσατο θέλω αὐτὸν συγκληρονόμον τῷ υἱῷ μου ποιῆσαι, ὅτι τὸ καλὸν φρονήσας οὐ παρενεθυμήθη, ἀλλ' ἐτέλεσεν αὐτό.

any definite time sequence in the development of Christological thought, or to be quite certain which opinion actually held the field at different times. The naivety of the view contained in Mark's account of the baptism seems to stamp it as fairly primitive, emanating from a period prior to that of the more developed and well-established Christologies current in the Evangelist's own time, and forming what may be called, an 'erratic block' in his Gospel.

It is not difficult to account for the formation of the tradition. Christian baptism was regarded from early times as being the means of acquiring the gift of the Holy Spirit. What could be more natural than that the Holy Spirit, which, after Pentecost, was thought of as descending upon those baptised in the name of the Lord, should have been farther represented as descending par excellence on Christ at his baptism, the proto-type of Christian baptism? The figure of the dove is perfectly appropriate to the Holy Spirit, and is the product of the pious and poetic imagination.<sup>1</sup> The opening of the heavens may be compared with the visions of Ezekiel<sup>2</sup> or with the apocalyptic language of Jn.1:51, while the voice is parallel to numerous

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1. Cf. Song of Sol., 5:2; Is.60:8; Ezek.7:16; Nahum 2:7. The three uses of the dove in O.T.times, for a sacrifice, a covenant, and a purgation all suggest spiritual interpretation and quite well explain the present symbolism. Cf. Robertson Smith: Religion of the Semites, p.294.

2. 'The heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.' 1:1.

other instances of the same phenomenon as instanced in Josephus<sup>1</sup> and the Talmud. Abrahams points out that in certain cases the "Daughter of the Voice" was identified with the Holy Spirit, and that both were sometimes associated in rabbinical contexts with the symbolism of the dove.<sup>2</sup> On great and solemn occasions the "Daughter of the Voice" (Bath-Quol), spoke. It is possible, then, that in the early Christian community this delightful symbolism was woven around the story of the baptism of Jesus. It would express in vivid terms the thought that Jesus, at the moment of his baptism, received from God the gift of the Holy Spirit, which made him Messiah, which, in turn, guaranteed the same gift of the Spirit to all those who were baptised in his name.

The narrative of the baptism of Jesus is what Bultmann has aptly described as a "Glaubens-Legend", or a Story of Faith.<sup>3</sup> In its details, it is not history, but above history. Such a narrative does not admit of too harsh critical investigation. It must be believed or not believed.

(c) There is no indication in the oldest tradition that John realised that he was baptising the Messiah. Certainly if it is maintained that the opening of the heavens, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the voice are historic in

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1. E.g. Antiq., xiii.10.3.(282.).

2. Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels, i, pp.47ff.

3. Forsch.zur Religion und Literatur, N.F., xii, pp.152-153.

the full sense of the word, then it is difficult to conceive how John himself could have failed to interpret the signs. It is true that even in the Marcan narrative the voice is represented as having spoken to all assembled, but is this to be put down to actual historical fact, or to the community in which the tradition was developed? It seems more natural to attribute it to the latter, rather than to the former, because there is no indication that John realised that Jesus was Messiah even at a later point of time.<sup>1</sup> In either case, it is precarious to overstress the ideas of subjectivity and objectivity which undoubtedly meant far less to the ancients than they do now. The baptismal experience, it would seem, was peculiar to Jesus himself, and the account of it was inspired by the faith of those who believed in him. There is no indication that Jesus ever alluded to this experience, else such an allusion would almost inevitably have found its way into the Gospels, like his strange and striking words at Lk. 10:18. At the greatest moment of his life, the Baptist did not realise that he was baptising the One on whom all his hopes were set. For John, the baptism of Jesus was but one among many, but for Jesus, it signified that the time was at hand when he must begin his own ministry, confident in the approval of his heavenly Father.

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1. Cf. chapter VI, pp.289-300.

CHAPTER IV.

## THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

## A.

There is evidence in the New Testament that there existed during the Baptist's life-time a group of disciples closely associated with that preacher. There is evidence, too, that these disciples maintained their existence for a certain time after John's death. Just how long they did so, however, is a disputed question. In fact, the question may be asked: Did John intend to form a group of disciples to carry on his ministrations after he himself had gone? Or did his disciples do so without any actual warrant from the Baptist himself? Did they, as has been supposed, form a rival group which proved dangerous to the early Christian Church, and are traces of polemic against this group to be found in the Fourth Gospel? Finally, can the Mandaeans, who still exist, and who call themselves "disciples of St. John", be regarded as actual descendants of the original Baptist group?

So much has been written, particularly by German scholars, in favour of the last-mentioned point, that it will be advisable to investigate the relevant evidence in a separate section in this chapter. Whatever conclusions, however, are reached as to the N.T. evidence for or against



the existence of a Baptist sect, these conclusions will not affect the argument regarding the Mandaeans. In all fairness the claims of the Mandaeans to be regarded as descendants of an original Baptist group will be considered on their own merit, and decisions will be based on this factor alone.

Although the Gospel references to the disciples of John are few, they are sufficient to show that such a body did exist. They are mentioned in the Fourth Gospel as baptising with their master,<sup>1</sup> and in the Synoptics as having been sent by John to enquire whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah.<sup>2</sup> They appear to have prayed and fasted,<sup>3</sup> and after John's execution they were permitted to take away his body and bury it.<sup>4</sup>

From the evidence available, it is very clear that there existed certain marked differences between the disciples of John and the disciples of Jesus. It is nowhere stated that the former went out and preached like Christ's disciples. There are no traces of any special organisation of their company, nor of any intention on John's part that they should continue his work after his death.<sup>5</sup> If it

1. 3:25. 2. Matt.11:2-6 = Lk.7:18-23.

3. Mk.2:18 = Matt.9:14; cf. Lk.5:33 and Lk.11:1.

4. Matt.14:12 = Mk.6:9.

5. The phrase of Josephus βαπτισμῷ συνιέναι means not "to band together by baptism", i.e. to form an organised group, but simply "to come together for baptism". It is parallel to μάχῃ συνιέναι = "to come together for battle". Cf. Thackeray: Josephus, the Man and the Historian, p.132.

is borne in mind that the Baptist believed that the end of the world was at hand, it may well be asked: Would he have considered it necessary to organise a body of disciples and to equip them with instructions for the future? The answer is certainly in the negative. It seems highly probable, then, that if there outlived the Baptist a group of men powerful enough to constitute a danger to the Christian Church, this group did so without any warrant from John himself.

The most direct evidence which points or appears to point to the existence of a continuing Johannine group is contained in (a) Acts 18:24-26, the account of Apollos, and (b) Acts 19:1-8, the narrative of the disciples at Ephesus.

(a) 'A certain Jew, named Apollos, an Alexandrian, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, arrived at Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spake and taught with diligence the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue; and when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God exactly.'

(b) 'Paul, having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus, and finding certain disciples there, said to them: Did you receive the Holy Spirit on believing? And they said to him: We have not even heard if there be Holy

Spirit. And Paul said: What baptism did you receive? And they said: John's baptism. And Paul said: John gave a baptism of repentance telling the people to believe on him who was to come after him, that is, on Jesus. Hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. And Paul laid his hands upon them and the Holy Spirit descended upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied, and, in all, there were some twelve of them.'

It is remarkable that both these incidents took place at Ephesus, and still more remarkable when it is borne in mind that the Fourth Gospel was probably written at that place, and that in this Gospel there are very evident tendencies to diminish the importance of John the Baptist, if not actually to direct a polemic against him. So striking is the coincidence that, in many cases, critics have concluded that the disciples at Ephesus, and in some cases, Apollos too, are to be regarded as members of a continuing Baptist group. In view of the coincidence, however, the matter requires all the more cautious examination, and one must beware of rushing into pitfalls.

The narrative dealing with the disciples at Ephesus is probably less difficult than the Apollos narrative, and may be taken first.

On his arrival at Ephesus, Paul found certain disciples there. The use of the word 'disciples' is significant.

There is no doubt that it means 'Christians'<sup>1</sup> and unless it is an ex post facto title, it is difficult to see how it could have been used of the followers of John. McGiffert finds it strange that the term should have been used of these people at all, because it is implied, he holds, that they knew nothing whatsoever about Jesus.<sup>2</sup> It is not certain, however, that any such implication is intended. The point of the narrative seems to lie, not in the ignorance of these people of Jesus or of the Gospel - an ignorance which is only apparent and not borne out by the sequel - but rather in the difference between John's baptism and Christian baptism, the former being a baptism with water only, the latter, with the Holy Spirit. The growth of the Christian rite of baptism has already been traced, and it has been noted how it passed through certain well-defined stages in the thought and practice of the early community, first, the free and unlimited Spirit baptism, second, baptism with water in the name of Jesus which conferred the gift of the Holy Spirit, and third, baptism plus the laying on of hands, after which the Holy Spirit was understood to descend.<sup>3</sup> The present narrative reflects very well these stages. Paul first asks, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit, when you believed?', i.e. when

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1. Compare the use of the term in other passages in Acts, particularly in 11:26. Everywhere it means 'Christians'.
  2. History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age, p.286.
  3. Cf. chapter III, section (e).

you became Christians? The reply of the men of Ephesus, 'No! we have not even heard if there be Holy Spirit', so startles Paul, that he immediately turns to the second way of receiving Holy Spirit, 'What baptism did you have, then, when you did not receive Holy Spirit?' The answer, 'John's baptism', at once clears up the matter. The limitations of John's baptism are duly explained. 'John gave only a (water) baptism of repentance', and the significance of John's preaching is radically altered to suit the Christian point of view, 'telling the people to believe on him who was to come, that is on Jesus.' There is no indication that John ever exhorted those whom he baptised to believe on the Coming One. He was content to point out that a Coming One was at hand, and in view of this, it was essential to repent. But when, in the early Christian community, the Coming One of John's preaching was identified with Jesus, it was perfectly natural that John should have been represented as urging belief in this Coming One, that is, in Jesus. The twelve disciples at Ephesus do not hesitate to accept this argument - as they might well have done, had they been wholly ignorant of the Gospel and had they not known that Jesus was indeed Messiah - and they are baptised in the name of Christ, and, as an added assurance of the gift of the Spirit, Paul lays his hands upon them, and they receive the Holy Spirit in truth. There is no

question, then, of these men of Ephesus not knowing Christ or that Jesus was Messiah. The whole point of the narrative, though doubtless it is coloured somewhat by the author's own point of view, is that baptism in the name of Jesus, followed by the laying on of hands, was an essential means of procuring Holy Spirit.

A very interesting variation occurs in the  $\delta$  text. Instead of, 'We have not even heard if there be Holy Spirit', the disciples are given to say, 'We have not even heard if some do receive Holy Spirit.' It may be that the latter reading is an attempt to modify the harshness of the former, but, on the other hand, the former is in itself scarcely credible. Ephesus was full of  $\piνευματικοί$ , 'spiritual' persons, and it is unlikely that the disciples had never heard of Holy Spirit. Perhaps the meaning is that at their baptism by John, they had heard nothing about Holy Spirit - which would be perfectly intelligible - but more probably the real gist of the conversation is given by the  $\delta$  reading, viz. that the disciples lacked proof that Holy Spirit could actually be given, and that they were anxious to experience this dispensation for themselves.

The case of Apollos is not greatly different from that of the twelve disciples. Possessing the gift of eloquence, this Alexandrian was at pains to proclaim to

the world his knowledge of the Gospel and of Jesus. It is, no doubt, the contrast between the exuberant and outspoken faith of Apollos, and the reserved attitude of the twelve disciples, which has, in part, led critics to suppose that the latter were in reality ignorant of the Gospel. But there is no real justification for this point of view. Both Apollos and the twelve disciples had heard of Jesus and the Gospel, but their reactions manifested themselves in different ways.

Apollos is said to have been 'instructed in the way of the Lord' and to have 'taught with diligence the things concerning the Lord', although he knew the baptism of John only. It would be interesting to know precisely what is meant by 'the things concerning the Lord'. Various explanations have been given, but it is probable that the expression means quite simply "the principal events in the life of Jesus". These events, Apollos knew, and he related them, perhaps with an admixture of Gnostic speculation characteristic of Alexandrian philosophy,<sup>1</sup> but nevertheless, with enthusiasm and ardour. What he did not know, however, was that, according to the doctrine of the early Church, Christian baptism, as contrasted with John's baptism, was a means of obtaining Holy Spirit. Apparently

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1. Cf. I.Cor. 1:12.

his enunciation 'of the things concerning the Lord' omitted this important detail, and Priscilla and Aquila took him aside to give him exact<sup>1</sup> information on this point, which is described, in contrast with 'the things concerning the Lord', as 'the way of God'. It is somewhat surprising that we do not read in so many words that Apollos was actually baptised, and thus received personally the distinguishing mark of a Christian. The most feasible explanation of this, is, perhaps, that the actual baptism is to be regarded as implicit in the 'exact instruction' which Priscilla and Aquila imparted.<sup>2</sup> The point of the Apollos narrative is therefore exactly the same as that of the twelve disciples - namely, the contrast between John's baptism and Christian baptism.

What account, then, can be given for the existence of people like Apollos and the twelve disciples? It may be that many Jews and others, who made the Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem from distant parts, had been powerfully attracted by the Baptist's announcement of a Coming One, and feeling that repentance was necessary, had submitted themselves

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1. The word ἀκριβέστερον has the sense, not of a true comparative, but of an adverb, 'exactly', as often.
  2. It cannot be very well supposed that the account of the baptism is suppressed because Apollos already possessed the Holy Spirit, ('fervent in Spirit', ζῶν τῷ πνεύματι). This expression means surely no more than that Apollos was filled with a 'fervour of spirit' in his proclamation of the events of the life of Jesus. Cf. Romans 12:11.



to the baptism of John. They had, moreover, on a subsequent visit, been impressed by the teaching of Jesus and had acquainted themselves with the principal events of his life. It may even be surmised that a few - but only a few - of the shrewder minds had identified in some way the Coming One of John's preaching with Jesus. These tidings they conveyed to their own countries, but the tidings would in some cases contain no account of Pentecost, because, after the crucifixion of Jesus and the feast of Passover, some would return imagining, as is perfectly natural, that the whole story was complete. To more distant parts news of the experience at Pentecost would spread only gradually, and here in Ephesus, were people, (who no doubt had recently arrived there from more remote districts), who knew about the story of Jesus, but who knew nothing about the developing doctrine of the relation between baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. They knew only the baptism of John; they were unacquainted with the "way of God".

If this interpretation of the two passages is correct, the following three points may, perhaps, be made. (a) Further support is given to the view, already stated, that the preaching of John contained no mention of a coming baptism in Holy Spirit. He pointed to a baptism with fire and with wind only.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Cf. Moffatt: Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge, p.194.

(b) It may be supposed with very good reason that baptism was hardly ever, if at all, practised by the disciples of Jesus, and never by Jesus himself - a conclusion previously indicated after examination of the relevant passages in the Fourth Gospel and elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> It is inconceivable, that people who had submitted themselves to John's baptism, and who knew the principal events in the life of Jesus, should have been unacquainted with the baptism of Jesus, had such a rite actually been practised by our Lord. The facts are best explained by assuming that Jesus and his disciples never baptised, and that the practice was instituted by the Early Church along the lines indicated in the previous chapter.

(c) There are no real grounds for believing that Apollos and the disciples at Ephesus were disciples of John the Baptist in the full sense of the word. They were merely a few among many of those who had received John's baptism. They were Christians, but not full Christians, according to the point of view of the Early Church. They lacked what the official Christian community demanded - as Luke conceived it - baptism and the gift of the Spirit. The former was the means of receiving the latter, and in certain cases the laying on of hands was also necessary. The

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1. Cf. chapter II, p.81ff.

utmost that can be said of Apollos and the twelve is that they may have had treasured memories of their former teacher at whose hands they had received a baptism of repentance. It is just as probable however that they, one and all, cherished equally lasting memories of Jesus. At any rate, it seems to be quite unnecessary to see in them traces of an opposition movement to Christianity. This is the product of the hyper-critical imagination.

As for the Fourth Gospel, it must be admitted that here a very marked tendency is to be found to minimise the importance of John the Baptist as compared with Jesus. So unmistakable is this tendency that many critics have concluded that the polemic is in reality directed against a continuing Johannine group who exalted the claims of their master above those of Jesus, and some have even asserted that the purpose of the Fourth Gospel was to combat this sect.<sup>1</sup> This could only be true - though it need not be - if the passages in which the polemic appears could be attributed to the author of the Gospel. Their claims to being integral to the Gospel must, therefore, be examined.

(a) Jn. 1:6-8, and v.15. It is commonly held that these verses break the sequence of the Prologue, 1:1-18,

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1. The literature on this subject is so extensive that no satisfactory list can be given. It is dealt with in practically every commentary on the Fourth Gospel, and opinion is almost equally divided for and against the polemic.

and should be assigned to the Redactor. There are some grounds for this belief. It is true that v.9 follows very naturally on v.5, and that v.16 forms an excellent continuation of the thought expressed in v.14. It is also true that vv. 6-8, and v.15 cannot be fitted into the rhythmic scheme of the Hymn to the Logos. They interrupt the sequence of thought and give the impression at first sight, at any rate, of being redactional. This impression is not confirmed, however, by the style of the verses in question. In v.8, in particular, there are stylistic traits very characteristic of the Evangelist himself. Thus:-

(i) ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ : the Evangelist is very partial to this construction. Cf. 11:4, ἵνα δοξασθῇ ; 6:40, ἵνα ... ἐχῇ, (Exegetical ἵνα clauses), 15:8, 15:12, etc.

(ii) The placing side by side of negative and positive: Cf. 3:17, an exact model of 1:8, 7:28, 15:16, 15:19, 17:9, 17:15, etc.

In view of this, it is perhaps somewhat precarious to assign these verses to the Redactor. They are more probably a parenthesis of the Evangelist himself. If this is true of vv. 6-8, it is not impossible that v.15 also belongs to the Evangelist, and if the Evangelist thought it necessary to interrupt his Hymn in this way, it is likely that he was driven to do so by some very pressing occasion.

(b) 5:31ff. In this section also, which further minimises the role of John, traces of the Redactor have been seen. The theme of the section is the contrast between the witness of John and the witness of God. Now it is very clear that these verses illustrate the key-theme of the Fourth Evangelist, viz. the desire to show that Jesus is indisputably the Son of God. John's witness is represented as satisfactory enough, but in v.36 the ultimate claims are made to rest on the testimony of the Father. This is surely the atmosphere of the Prologue. John's witness, here as there, is represented as being of importance less for Jesus, than for the Jews. True, 'John was a burning and a shining light', but the feebleness of that light as compared with the light of Jesus is again subtly emphasised. 'You were content to rejoice in his (John's) light for a season'. All this is so characteristic of the theme of the Gospel, that it might be ascribed more readily to the Evangelist himself than to the hand of the Redactor.

(c) 10:40-42. The stylistic peculiarities of these verses, (which need not be examined in detail here), which again reflect depreciation of John, make it unlikely that they are integral to the Gospel. Possibly they point to the Redactor's desire to minimise still further the importance of John the Baptist.

As a result of this analysis, it is not easy to feel

quite sure that the Fourth Gospel in its original form did not contain a certain measure of polemic directed towards minimising the significance of John the Baptist. This is suggested both by the Prologue, and at 5:31, in particular, and the polemic seems to have been continued at certain points, especially at 10:40ff., by the Redactor. The question now arises: Against whom was the polemic of the Evangelist directed, since he thought it necessary to advance periodically such glancing thrusts?

In view of the lack of evidence for a continuing Baptist group, it is difficult to adopt the view that the polemic is directed against a genuine Johannine group. It is much more likely that the Evangelist is dealing with a contemporary movement on the part of certain Jews, who sought to buttress their opposition to Christianity by exalting the claims of John the Baptist. These Jews were not genuine disciples of John, nor even descendants of the same, but they invented this clever method of attacking Christianity, apparently with some little success. They seem to have thrown an apple of discord into the Church, the removal of which necessitated an urgent appeal by the Fourth Evangelist. The language which the Fourth Evangelist employs referring to John, 'He was not the Light', is undoubtedly the terminology which certain of the disaffected ones within the Christian community would use in interpret-

ing the contemporary Jewish movement.<sup>1</sup> There is no evidence that this movement achieved any great measure of success, although it lasted long enough, apparently, to occasion a few more warnings on the part of the Redactor. No doubt, it is to be regarded on the whole as comparatively short-lived; the polemic of the Evangelist, and the Redactor, coupled with the insecure foundation on which the movement was built, would quickly bring about its failure. The apparent polemic, therefore, against a Johannine group will amount to no more than a special feature of the anti-Jewish tendency of the Fourth Gospel.

Another writing in which allusions to a continuing Johannine group have been traced is the Clementine Recognitions. In the course of an account of various Jewish sects, Sadducees, Samaritans, and Pharisees, the following statements appear:-

"Some of the disciples of John who appeared to be great ones separated themselves from the people and declared their own master to be Christ."<sup>2</sup>

"And, behold, one of the disciples of John declared

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1. In this way it is possible to answer the objection of Goguel to the view of Schwartz: Nach.v.d.Kön.Ges.d.Wiss. z.Göt., Phil-hist.Kl., pp.522ff., that the polemic is directed against Jews. Certainly, Jews would not refer to John as 'the Light', i.e. a divine being, as Goguel points out, but their theories would easily lend themselves to this interpretation and terminology in the Christian community.

2. i:54.

that John was Christ, and not Jesus: because, he said, Jesus himself declared that John was greater than all men and prophets. If, then, he said, John is greater than all men, he must be doubtless greater than Moses and Jesus himself. But if he is greater than all, then he is Christ."<sup>1</sup>

A great variety of opinion still prevails as to the value of the Clementine Recognitions as a source for the early stages of the history of Christianity. The Tübingen school has laid great stress upon them, and Hilgenfeld writes, "There is scarcely a single writing which is of so much consequence for the history of Christianity in its first stage, and which has already given such brilliant disclosures at the hands of the most renowned critics, in regard to the early history of the Christian Church, as the writings ascribed to the Roman Clement, the Recognitions and Homilies."<sup>2</sup> Other critics have perhaps more accurately regarded the Clementine Recognitions as a kind of philosophical and theological romance. "The writer of the work", says Dr. Smith, "seems to have had no intention of presenting his statements as facts; but, choosing the disciples of Christ and their followers as his principal

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1. i:60. The Clementine Recognitions were originally written in Greek the original of which is lost; a Latin translation was undertaken by Rufinus of Aquila. (410 A.D.).
  2. Die Clem.Recog.und Hom.nach ihrem Ursprung und Inhalt dargestellt, p.1.



characters. he has put into their mouths the most important of his beliefs, and woven the whole together by a thread of fictitious narrative."<sup>1</sup>

Those critics who have found in the Acts and in the Fourth Gospel sufficient evidence to sustain their theory of a continuing Baptist group, have not been slow to seize upon the passages quoted above as strengthening, if not actually clinching, their argument. They believe that as the Clementine Recognitions reflect the conditions of the Church in the third century A.D., there is evidence here that there must have been a gradual development within it of a heretic group who magnified John the Baptist at the expense of Jesus. But do the texts in question really give any countenance to such an opinion? "It must be remarked", writes Buzy<sup>2</sup>, "that the text says nothing regarding the continuation of the Johannites as a sect. If the sect of Johannites really possessed any effective organisation, or was in any way renowned, it is astonishing that early writers such as Hegesippus, Justin, Eusebius, Epiphanius, knew nothing or at least wrote nothing about it." It would seem, therefore, that the Clementine Recognitions refer either to a tendency on the part of some of the Baptist's hearers to regard him

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1. The Clementine Recognitions, p.137.

2. John the Baptist, Eng.Ed., p.243.

as Messiah during his life-time only, or more probably to the movement of the Jews against Christianity, already mentioned as giving rise to the polemic in the Fourth Gospel. Certainly the reasoning by which John is made greater than Christ savours very strongly of typical Jewish casuistry!

It only remains to say something of the Hemerobaptists who have been regarded by some as being related to the disciples of John the Baptist.<sup>1</sup> The Hemerobaptists are referred to by Hegesippus, writing about 160 A.D., as one among other Jewish sects,<sup>2</sup> while Epiphanius, about the end of the 4th century, describes them as having held the same tenets as the Scribes and the Pharisees, though they were Sadducean as to the Resurrection. "Above all they have this special characteristic that in spring and autumn, summer and winter, they bathe every day, whence their nickname of Hemerobaptists. They say one cannot live in human fashion, unless one plunges each day into water, to wash and purify oneself from all stain."<sup>3</sup> In the Apostolic Constitutions a description appears of Hemerobaptists "who every day, unless they wash, they do not eat: nay, and unless they cleanse their beds and tables, or platters and cups and seats, do not use any of them."<sup>4</sup> Fin-

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1. Blakiston: John the Baptist, pp.137ff., holds that the Baptists of John, and the Hemerobaptists amalgamated, and produced a Christian heresy.

2. Cf. Eusebius: Eccl.Hist.iv.22.7.; Loeb Eusebius I, p.376.

3. Haereses, 1:37.

4. vi.6.

ally in the Clementine Homilies, John the Baptist himself is described as a Hemerobaptist.<sup>1</sup> On the strength of this evidence it may be said that the sect of Hemerobaptists, if indeed there did exist a distinct sect bearing that name, was known during the first four centuries A.D.. There is nothing, however, in the description of their practices which suggests any close connection between them and John the Baptist. Particularly to be observed are the repeated illustrations of the Hemerobaptists as compared with the single baptism of John. The antecedents of this sect should be sought in the Pharisaic washings, or in the repeated baptisms of the Essenes, or it may be supposed, perhaps less plausibly, with Schürer, that "a special sectarian name has been fabricated from a characteristic peculiarity of all Jews."<sup>2</sup> It is not quite accurate that all Jews took a daily bath as is reported of the Hemerobaptists, but perhaps, in the Diaspora, the practice became common enough through imitation of the heathen, to give rise to the peculiar nickname. At any rate, it is almost certainly the Hemerobaptists to whom Justin Martyr alludes when he speaks of six Jewish heresies, the last of which was the Baptist heresy,<sup>3</sup> and it is further probable that by a similar

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1. ii.23. A highly fantastic account of John's disciples follows this.

2. Op.cit., II, vol.ii, p.210.

3. Dial.c.Trypho, 80:4.

confusion the Clementine Homilies refer to John as a Hemerobaptist. It is sufficient, however, to observe the complete dissimilarity of practice between John's disciples and the Hemerobaptists - a fact which in itself is sufficient to remove all thought of the latter being a genuine continuing Baptist group.

In conclusion, it may be helpful to tabulate, for the sake of clarity, the arguments for and against a Baptist Sect opposed to the early Church.

In favour of the existence of the sect are these points:-

- (a) The appearance in Acts of a group of people who might be regarded as disciples of John the Baptist..
- (b) The curious coincidence that these people were found in Ephesus where the Fourth Gospel was probably written with its polemic against John.
- (c) The evidence of the Clementine Recognitions.

Against the existence of the sect are these points:-

- (a) The fact that, on critical examination, the people at Ephesus have no real claims to be regarded as members of a continuing Baptist group. They were, in reality, Christians, except that they lacked baptism and its gift, the Holy Spirit.
- (b) The fact that the polemic in the Fourth Gospel can equally well be understood as directed against a contemporary Jewish movement which had, in part, made its influence felt in the Church.
- (c) The fact that the Clementine Recognitions may quite well, in turn, allude to this movement, and not necessarily to a genuine continuing Baptist group.

Thus far the evidence is admittedly fairly evenly balanced, but when the following considerations are added, the balance seems to swing quite definitely against the idea of a continuing Baptist sect.

(a) The lack of organisation of John's disciples during his lifetime.

(b) The unlikelihood that John, who believed that the end of the world was near, would make disciples in the true and full sense of the word.

(c) The fact that the disciples of John, unlike the disciples of Jesus, had no vision of their Risen Master. It was the Recurrence of Jesus which gave his disciples hope, drew them more closely together, and inspired in them the determination to carry the Gospel message to all nations. There was nothing parallel to this in the case of John's disciples.

(d) The silence of Paul. Had there really been a Johannine group who exalted their claims above those of Jesus, it is very surprising that an attack upon them did not form part of the missionary propaganda of the early Church. Not even John the Baptist himself is mentioned by Paul.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Blakiston: op.cit., p.136, regards Rom.6:4 as an allusion to John the Baptist, but this seems very improbable.

(e) The silence of early writers such as Hegesippus, Eusebius and Epiphanius. (See above, on the Hemerobaptists).

It may be concluded that neither was it the Baptist's intention to group together around him a body of men to continue his ministry after he himself had gone, nor did any of his followers seriously contemplate doing so. During his life-time John had a number of disciples or followers upon whom he enjoined his ascetic ways of living, but at no time, it would seem, did he band them into a fully organised discipleship. After the axe had done its deadly work in some Galilean fortress, they soon disintegrated and dispersed, taking with them cherished memories of their master, and mourning the untimely end of so great a soul.

## B.

Since German scholars of note have pronounced that in the Mandaean literature may be found the key to the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, and since they have raised in a more acute form the possibility of the Mandaeans being closely connected with a John the Baptist sect, it is necessary to consider this problem in a study of John the Baptist. Two questions present themselves: first, the relation, if any, between Mandaism and Christianity; second, the relation, if any, between the Mandaeans and John the

Baptist. These two questions are of course closely related, and the answer to the first will have an important bearing upon the answer to the second. In the examination of the first question, the history and literature of the Mandaeans will be treated in general, and in the second attention will be paid, in particular, to the personality of John the Baptist as he appears in the Mandaean literature.

### I.

The Mandaeans dwell at the present day on the lower reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates, in the southernmost part of Iraq, and in a small part of the province of Chuzistan. Although their numbers are comparatively small, about 10,000 souls,<sup>1</sup> they still continue to avoid absorption with their Muslim neighbours. They practise frequent rites of baptism in running water, hold an observance closely resembling the Christian Eucharist, and lay peculiar stress upon certain teaching on "Light" and "Life". They are called by their neighbours Subbis or Baptisers, but the name which they themselves use is Mandaeans. The Mandaean documents call them Nazoreans. They have a language of their own, but it is rarely used now except for religious purposes. In everyday conversation they speak Arabic or

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1. According to the latest information of K. Dojaily, Lecturer in Arabic at the School of Oriental Studies. Cited by G.R.S. Mead: The Gnostic John, p.29. Souffi's estimate, in 1875, of 4,000, is, according to Mead, too low.

Persian. The Mandaean script is pleasing and graceful and the vowels are written in full. The chief extant documents are:-

- (a) The Ginza, (Treasury), divided into Right and Left pages, the former dealing with the living, the latter with the dead, though in some cases this order was apparently reversed. It consists of 64 tractates on various subjects, theological, ethical, cosmological, mythological, and historical, much of which dates from very ancient times.
- (b) The John-Book, a miscellany, but dealing in the main with the life and teaching of John the Baptist.
- (c) The Qolasta, (Quintessence), consisting of liturgies and hymns for baptism, marriage, and the dead.
- (d) The Dīwān, containing rules for the expiation of ceremonial offences, and descriptions of the regions through which the soul passes on its ascent.
- (e) The Asfar Malwashe, a book of the Zodiacal Constellations.
- (f) Inscriptions on cups and tablets.

The origin of the Mandaean sect has been keenly disputed, and it may be of interest and value to indicate the main trends of critical scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Period I, 1645-1777: ABRAHAMUS ECCEHELLENSIS in his Euty chius Patriarcha Alexandrinus vindicatus et suis restitutus Orientalibus, etc., maintains that the Mandaeans belong to those sects, qui dua principia tenent, and hence their religious outlook is dominated by a dualistic view of life. The Father of Light,

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1. The admirable classification of Svend Aage Pallis: Essay on Mandaean Bibliography 1560-1930, is followed here. Only the principal names, however, are selected.



Pater lucis, they call Abthahil, and his counterpart is Hesciucha, Darkness. He concludes that the Mandaeans are in reality a Gnostic sect with an Iranian admixture, and that they belonged from earliest times to the district in which they now live. RICHARD SIMON in his Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament also believes that the Mandaeans were a Gnostic sect, and identifies the word Mandai with "gnostikos", "knowing". He maintains further that there is a connection with the Chaldaeans as regards astrological ideas, and that there are Manichaeian elements also in the Mandaean system. BARTHÉLEMY D'HERBELOT in his Bibliothèque Orientale first suggests that the Mandaeans originally belonged to the West, and were connected with Jewish post-Christian sects, e.g. the Hemerobaptists. ISAAC DE BEAU-SOBRE in his Histoire Critique de Manichée et du Manichéisme suggests that there is a very definite affinity between the Mandaeans and the Manichaeans, while PICQUESIUS and LA CROZE in their remarkable Latin Letters are responsible for the extremist view that the Mandaeans are in fact Manichaeans. Apart from the descriptive works of IGNATIUS and THEVENOT who visited the Mandaeans, the afore-mentioned works give a concise and representative summary of Mandaean research in the first period. It is to be observed that three points of view already appear, postulating (a) an Eastern Gnostic

Origin (b) a Western (Hemerobaptist) origin, and (c) a Manichaeian origin. Period II, 1778-1821: a period of Mandaean textual study, crowned by NORBERG's edition of the Ginza in 1815-1816. No new suggestion was made by Norberg as to the origin of the Mandaeans, and he agrees with d'Herbelot's theory of their Western Hemerobaptist, as opposed to their Eastern Gnostic, origin. O.G.TYCHSEN in his Von der Sekte der Sabbaer und Nassairier criticises the whole of Norberg's work and holds that the Mandaeans were natives of Chaldea, as is shown by their language and script, and that the sect is essentially of late origin, originating not from the time of John the Baptist, but from the 9th century A.D.. On this Pallis remarks, "Even if nowadays we abandon the attempt to learn anything about the founder of the sect, Tychsen with his clear insight into the occurrence of Arabic and Christian as well as Iranian religious conceptions in the Mandaean writings is fully up to the standard of modern research. And Tychsen in conjunction with A. Echellensis who pointed out the dualism of the Mandaean religious system, and Simon who defined it as Gnostic with Chaldean and Manichaeian elements, laid the foundation of that understanding of the Mandaeans on which modern research is based."<sup>1</sup> OVERBECK in his

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1. Op.cit., p.55.

Neue Versuche über das Evangelium des Johannes, identifies the Mandaeans with the disciples of John the Baptist, against whom, he holds, the Fourth Evangelist directs a polemic. Echoes of this theory have been heard right down to the present day. Period III, 1822-1867: In this period A. JACQUES MATTER in his Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme goes back to Simon's view of the Gnostic origin of the Mandaeans, and in this is followed by BAUR in Die Christliche Gnosis, and, in part, by RENAN in his Histoire général et système comparé des langues semitiques. CHWOLSOHN in his Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus holds that the Mandaeans were Parsified Babylonian heathens, and that they gained their knowledge of Bible legends and characters from Jewish-Christian Gnostic neighbours. It is absurd to imagine, he maintains, that the Mandaeans had anything to do with John the Baptist. Period IV, 1867 onwards. In this period special reference must be made to the Text Editions of PETERMANN and LIDZBARSKI, to NÖLDEKE's masterly Mandäische Grammatik, and to BRANDT's Die mandäische Religion, the last containing an excellent detailed account of Mandaean religion, together with an historic-genetic presentation of its origin and development. Of great importance also are BOUSSET's Hauptprobleme der Gnosis, LIDZBARSKI's publication of the John-Book, (Lidzbarski goes back once more to the

Western theory), REITZENSTEIN'S Das mandäische Buch des Herrn der Grosse und die Evangelienüberlieferung, which has proved to be the central point of modern Mandaean research, and LOISY'S Le Mandéisme et Les Origines Chrétiennes. Besides the works mentioned, there is an extensive literature, to part of which reference will be made in the footnotes.

It will be apparent from this brief sketch of Mandaean research that the problem is a complicated one, and that critical opinion is widely divergent. Two main points, however, may be kept in mind in the course of the enquiry: (a) Were the Mandaeans of pre-Christian origin? (b) Did they originally dwell in the West, that is, in Palestine, or did they always belong to Babylonia in the East? If these well-defined questions are borne in mind, it may be easier to find a way through the Mandaean maze. It should be stated, however, at the outset, that since it lies outside the scope of the present work to give a full exposition of the Mandaean religion, only the broader aspects of the subject can be indicated here.

The earliest evidence for the existence of the Mandaean sect is that of Theodor bar Konai.<sup>1</sup> Writing about 792 A.D.

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1. Cf. Loisy: Le Mandéisme et les Origines Chrétiennes, p.19, note 1. Loisy points out that the book has been published by J.B.Chabot in his Oriental Library. Extracts may be found in H.Pognon: Inscriptions mandaites des coupes de Khouabir, 1899.

he states that the sect was founded by one, Ado, who had derived his teaching from the Marcionites, the Manichaeans, and the Kantaeans. Whatever doubts may be entertained as to the connection between Ado and the Mandaeans,<sup>1</sup> it must be remembered that Theodor gives very excellent information about other sects, and hence it would be unwise to reject altogether, as is often done, the indications he provides as to the date of the origin of the sect, especially as he himself lived in the district in which the Mandaeans dwell.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the evidence of Theodor, it is only by the Mandaean literature itself that any idea might be formed as to the origin of the sect. The Ginza, the principal work, is not homogeneous, but consists of a compilation of fragments of varying age and character, developing, it would seem, from polytheism to monotheism. The oldest parts are based mainly on the Babylonian religion, veiled under Jewish-Christian names, and deal with Theogony and Cosmogony. Thus, we read of "the great 'Fruit' from whom other unnumbered 'fruits' originated, and the 'Great Mana of Glory', including

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1. Loisy: op.cit., p.20, thinks that the connection is quite possible; Burkitt: Journal of Theological Studies, xxix, 1928, p.232, thinks that "Theodor's account of the Mandaeans may be reasonably interpreted."
  2. Cf. Peterson: Z.N.T.W., xxvii, 1928, pp.65ff., "Seine (Theodor's) Mitteilungen über manche sonst völlig unbekannte Sekten Mesopotamiens sind für uns von so einzigartigen Wert, weil sie auf einem inmitten dieser Sekten lebenden Augenzeugen zurückgehen."

the 'First Life' and the 'Great Life'. From the latter, many other Manas sprang, including 'his image', Manda d'Haya, 'Knowledge of Life'. Other divine beings are Hibil, Sitil and Enos, who inhabit the lofty Ayar-land watered by 'the great Jordan', which is described as a stream of 'white water' and as the 'living', the 'shining and sparkling water'. Far below lies the underworld, the world of darkness, or 'black water'. The creation of the firmament, the earth, and of man, is assigned to Ptahil, who is thus the Mandaean Demiurge, and sometimes the evil spirits of the underworld are mentioned as sharing in the task. But whatever be the case as regards the body, the soul is heavenly in its origin: it is breathed into Adam by Manda d'Haya or is sent down by one of the envoys from the Treasure House of Life, and for protection against the wiles of evil spirits man is instructed from the beginning about his origin and the nature of true religion."<sup>1</sup> Of later date, and shewing Persian influence, are the eschatological ideas contained in the work. Later still are the Jewish, Christian and Manichaeian elements,<sup>2</sup> and finally appears the monotheistic doctrine of the King of Light. "The King of Light sits in 'the high north', and is Lord of all Light-beings, the creator of all

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1. Vincent Taylor: Hibbert Journal, xxviii, 1930, p.534.

2. Brandt: Die mandäische Religion, p.46, calls this, 'Die Verwirrung der mandäischen Theologie.'

forms, and of endless grace and goodness. Opposed to his rule is the 'King of Darkness', a gigantic monster, frightful in his fury, at the raising of whose eyes the mountains tremble, and at the whisper of whose lips the plains rock. Earth and sky with all that they contain are brought into being at the command of the King of Light, or by means of his envoy, and the soul of man is his creation."<sup>1</sup> Now if the Mandaean literature could be safely regarded as giving a true indication of the age of the sect, there would be little doubt that it existed hundreds of years before Christ and hence, that it might have passed through a period of direct contact with Christianity. It does not seem, however, that the thoroughly composite Mandaean literature justifies such a conclusion. When it is recalled that the district in which the Mandaeans now dwell has been the site of the most varied admixtures of population - Aramaeans, Christians, Persians, Jews, and even people of Indian descent, - the possibility at once suggests itself that the Mandaeans found a rich deposit of composite ideas in Maisan, and inherited or took over from neighbouring sects many of the conceptions which appear in their literature. Certainly the Mandaean literature was not reduced to its present form before 700 A.D., which roughly agrees

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1. Taylor: op.cit., p.535.

with Theodor's estimate as to the date of the origin of the sect.

In favour of a Western and an early origin of the Mandaean sect, are invoked, apart from the Baptist and the Christian elements, the Jewish material in the Mandaean literature, the anti-Christian polemic, the role which Jerusalem and the Jordan play in the writings, an Apocalypse in the Ginza thought by Reitzenstein to refer to conditions in the year 70 A.D., the Nabataean elements in the script, and the affinities of terminology with the Fourth Gospel.

The Jewish elements appear in certain Mandaean prayers and in particular conceptions embodied in the King of Light doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Equally Jewish is the emphasis laid upon the giving of alms, upon piety, and upon family duties. These characteristics have given rise to the opinion that the Mandaeans were originally Jews. There is, however, scarcely sufficient evidence to warrant this conclusion. There is no proof that the Mandaeans were really acquainted with Jewish sources of the O.T.,<sup>2</sup> while the texts which the Mandaean scholars did use were often grossly misunderstood by them. "Otherwise", writes Brandt,<sup>3</sup> "they would not have derived

1. Ginza, Lidzb., p.73, 10ff.(= G.R.iii.76.); p.5, 1ff.(= G.R.i.1-15.).
2. Burkitt: art.cit., p.235, writes, "The Biblical knowledge of the Mandaeans can all be traced to a study of the Peshitta, the Bible of the official Christians of Babylonia, including the unsympathetic portrait of Jesus Christ."
3. Die jüdischen Baptismen, p.147, and E.R.E., vol.viii, p.385; cf. Loisy: op.cit., p.64.



from the name Moses, the form Mescha, from Miriam, Mirjai, from Israel, Usriel, from Jacob, Jaqif, from the angels of heaven, Kings etc." The polytheistic system of the Mandaeans is also in strong contrast to the monotheism of the Jews, as also are the figures of the Devil in the respective literatures - Ruha and Satan, and the divergent views as to the Resurrection from the dead. Further, there is no reference in the Mandaean literature to circumcision, nor to turning towards Jerusalem in prayer, nor are the Mandaean festivals strictly of the Jewish type. It is not impossible, certainly, that the explanation of these facts may be that the Mandaeans were originally a Jewish group, and that the non-Jewish elements were absorbed through contact with Gnostic neighbours. But this is unlikely, and much more unlikely in view of the sharp polemic in their literature against the Jews.<sup>1</sup> It is much more natural to suppose that the Gnostic elements were original, and that the Jewish elements have been superimposed upon them. Accordingly, the view that the Mandaeans were originally a Jewish group does not seem satisfactory.

The anti-Christian polemic presents a more acute problem, and is indicative, it is held, by the champions of the Western

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1. Ginza, Lidzb., p.43, 4ff. (= G.R.ii.45.); p.225, 16ff. (= G.R.ix.224.).

theory,<sup>1</sup> of a close relationship between Mandaism and Christianity. The polemic appears periodically in the Ginza, and more so in the John-Book. Jesus bears the name Eshu Mshiha, and is a false prophet whose name is also Nbu, or the planet Mercury. He is a deceiver,<sup>2</sup> and is girt about with fire.<sup>3</sup> He leads the sons of men astray by vile sorceries,<sup>4</sup> and separates families.<sup>5</sup> Whether the details in the Mandaean literature relating to Jesus and John the Baptist sprang from an independent tradition will be examined presently. Meantime it may be asked if it is really necessary to believe that this polemic originated from actual contact between Mandaism and Christianity.

Peterson, in an article on the relationship between Mandaism and Christianity,<sup>6</sup> makes the very interesting and what appears to be in some ways the very attractive suggestion that the anti-Christian polemic was inspired by opposition to neighbouring sects whose practices and ideas were sufficiently close to those of the Mandaeans to threaten the latter with amalgamation or absorption. Thus, the Jazuquaeans, neighbours of the Mandaeans,<sup>7</sup> and identical, Peterson holds,

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1. E.g. by W.Bauer: Das Johannesevangelium, passim; Lohmeyer: Die Offenbarung des Johannes, passim; Bultmann: Z.N.T.W., xxiv, 1925, pp.100-146.
  2. Ginza, Lidzb., p.52, 3ff. (= G.R.ii.58).
  3. Ginza, Lidzb., p.29, 17ff. (= G.R.i.28).
  4. Ginza, Lidzb., p.52, 33ff. (= G.R.ii.59).
  5. Ginza, Lidzb., p.53, 2ff. (= G.R.ii.59).
  6. Art.cit., pp.55ff.
  7. Ginza, Lidzb., p.225, 4ff. (= G.R.ix.223-224).

with the Kantaeans, held doctrines extremely similar to those of the Mandaeans - Baptism, Communion, Sacrifice for the dead, the injunction to fidelity, - and it is probable that the Anti-Christian polemic gained some strength in opposition to sects like these, "who, living in the neighbourhood of the Mandaeans appeared to be dangerous rivals through the similarity of the cult and their religious literature."<sup>1</sup> Further, Peterson argues, if the Kantaeans were forerunners of the Mandaeans, and if the Mandaean anti-Christian polemic was inspired by opposition to that sect, and if the Kantaeans, as seems probable, appeared about the same time as the rising of the followers of Mazdak (490 A.D.), there is evidence that the prominence of the Mandaeans would date roughly from the time which Theodor bar Konai states. The 6th and 7th centuries would serve to impress the Baptist folk of the Euphrates with the danger of amalgamation, and this had its climax in the redaction of their literature about 700 A.D., assuring the independent existence of the sect, and incorporating a polemic against Christianity with the object of confirming this independence.

This argument is an ingenious one, perhaps too ingenious in its details, though it scarcely deserves so radical a criticism as that of Lidzbarski.<sup>2</sup> Whatever indications

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1. Art.cit., p.63.

2. Z.N.T.W., xxvii, 1928, pp.321ff.

it may provide as to the age of the Mandaean sect, it certainly shews that it is not essential to posit a definite relation between Mandaism and Christianity to explain the anti-Christian polemic. Perhaps, however, much of this so-called polemic is nothing more than a mere camouflage invented possibly at the time of the campaigns of Mohammed I.. The Mandaeans had no desire to be mistaken for Christians, and the surest way of ensuring their safety was to incorporate in their literature polemical passages against Christianity. Perhaps these two factors - the desire to avoid amalgamation with neighbouring sects, and, on a wider scale, to avoid persecution by the Muslim authorities - may explain the anti-Christian polemic in the Mandaean literature. It is to be observed that the polemic is sharpest in what are considered to be latest parts of the Mandaean books.

In further support of the Palestinian origin of the Mandaeans Lidzbarski writes, "They call the water in which they baptise, Jordan. I do not know how this appellation could originate unless the Mandaeans had some connection with the Jordan."<sup>1</sup> In reply to this, it has been pointed out with justification that 'Jordan' is a symbolical name for any kind of holy water. In a hymn of Severus of Antioch appears the following, 'Let us set forth and go to the mysterious cleans-

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1. Z.N.T.W., xxvi, 1927, p.71.

ing fountain of Jordan', i.e. to the spiritual Jordan or the temple of baptistry.<sup>1</sup> In Denzinger's Ritus Orientalium appear, 'Tu respice in has aquas creaturam tuam, et da eis gratiam salutis, benedictionem Jordanis, sanctificationem spiritus,'<sup>2</sup> and, 'Like angels are you, beloved, risen from Jordan through the power of the Holy Ghost.'<sup>3</sup> From these passages it appears that Jordan was a symbolical name among Syrian Christians for any type of baptismal water. While this is so, it is improbable that the terms 'Jerusalem' and 'Jordan' are to be understood symbolically in the Mandaean literature in every case. It seems that the use of these terms shows a curious admixture of Gnostic speculation coupled with an attempt by the Mandaeans to present their conflict with the Jews in Babylonia against a background of myths relating to Jerusalem, and the Jordan, which they had gathered and pieced together from the oral and written traditions of neighbouring sects. This argument is not invalidated by the contention that the Mandaeans suffered no opposition from the Jews in Babylonia. Little is known about the activities of the Jews in the East, but it seems certain, at least, that they persecuted in Egypt and at Palmyra.<sup>4</sup> It does not appear necessary, therefore, to believe that the

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1. Patrologia Orientalis, vol.vi, p.131.

2. I, p.275.

3. I, p.315. Cited by Peterson: Z.N.T.;W., xxv, 1926, p.238.

4. Cf. Patrologia Orientalis, vol.vi, Vie d'Alexandre l'Acémète, pp.685-686; Josephus: Antiq., xviii.9.1.(310ff.); xx.2.1.(17ff.).

Mandaeans were connected with Palestine because of the mention of Jerusalem and Jordan in their literature.

Little need be said regarding the section in the Ginza which Reitzenstein believes to be a genuine Mandaean Apocalypse referring to conditions in the year 70 A.D..<sup>1</sup> Lidzbarski sums up the matter quite admirably by stating that "a man who lived near the time of Christ could not call Pilate 'King of the World'", as, in fact, he is described in this Apocalypse.<sup>2</sup> Nor, as noted above, can any strong support for Reitzenstein's theory be derived from the appearance of the word 'Jerusalem', in the so-called 'King-Book' or 'Great Apocalypse'.<sup>3</sup> The remarkably accurate list of Persian kings which appears here, contrasts very strangely with the inaccuracies regarding Biblical history in the section immediately preceding, and points to the conclusion that this tractate was composed about the time of the overthrow of the Persian suzerainty in 632 A.D.. It appears to be of Persian origin, as is shown by the reference to a peculiar kind of Persian punishment,<sup>4</sup> and was probably taken over by the Mandaeans, worked over, and set in a typical Mandaean framework. Thus the reference to Jerusalem

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1. Ginza, Lidzb., p.29, 28-p.30, 14 (= G.R.i.29.).

2. Ginza, Lidzb., p.xii. But Reitzenstein: Z.N.T.W., xxvi, 1927, p.49, note 3, suggests that the words in question may be a later interpolation. There is, however, no proof of this.

3. Ginza, Lidzb., p.410, 6ff. (= B.R.xviii.381ff.).

4. Ginza, Lidzb., p.414, 29 (= G.R.xviii.387.).

here, and the expectation of the destruction of Jerusalem envisaged elsewhere - an element which, according to Reitzenstein, would have no point after the actual destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. - are perhaps, in these cases, at least, to be conceived of not as referring to the real Jerusalem, but in the symbolical sense of a Gnostic Aeon. On the whole, therefore, it would seem that there need be little hesitation in dismissing the idea that in the opening chapters of the Ginza there is an Apocalypse belonging to the year 70 A.D..

Lidzbarski maintains that the religious terminology of the Mandaeans belongs not to the Aramaic language of Babylon but has affinities with the language of the West.<sup>1</sup> Thus the word Manda itself is not at all a Babylonian word. On the strength of this Lidzbarski believes that support is given to the Western origin of the sect. Once again, however, this argument does not seem convincing. The Mandaeans in all probability took over considerable portions of their literature, and the result would be an admixture of terminology as well as of religious ideas. It is clear, at any rate, that there are a large number of Greek words in the Mandaean terminology: must it be supposed, therefore, that the Mandaeans originally belonged to Greece? Lidzbarski further holds that the Mandaean script has affinities with the Nabataean. Thus

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1. Art.cit., p.70.

the Mandaean 'Aleph' is the same as the Nabataean. As the Nabataeans dwelt on the borders of Palestine and Arabia, this shews, according to Lidzbarski, that the Mandaeans, too, belonged originally to the West.<sup>1</sup> In reply, it may be pointed out that any argument based on script is precarious. Peterson recalls, with justice, how unsuccessful was the attempt of Indo-Germanic scholars to base a history and to establish the original dwelling-place of the Indo-Germanic people in an investigation of the roots of their language and script.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the Mandaeans need not be regarded as of Western origin on the basis of Lidzbarski's data. More convincing proof is required before assent can be given to his theory.

Finally, the similarity in terminology and idea between the Fourth Gospel and Mandaism must be considered.<sup>3</sup> "Prominent in both is the thought of the mission of a divine Redeemer to impart life to men, and lead them from darkness to life;<sup>4</sup> of worlds which 'know not' Manda d'Haya and 'do not understand his light': of a Redeemer who knows his own and chooses them out of the world. The words 'light', 'truth' 'glory' occur in both literatures with great frequency. Of

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1. Art.cit., p.71.

2. Z.N.T.W., xxvii, 1928, p.63.

3. Examples of these may be found in the 2nd edition, (1925), of W.Bauer's Das Johannesevangelium.

4. "The Sent of the light am I, whom the Great One has sent into the world." Ginza, Lidzb., p.58, 17ff. (= G.R., ii, 64.).



the Mandaean Saviour it is said, 'Thou revealest to us the way of life, and didst allow us to travel the ways of truth and faith.'<sup>1</sup> There are references, too, to 'water' and 'bread' and the 'spring of life' and the 'Helper'. And finally sayings occur which are closely parallel to the great 'I am' sayings of the Gospel. Thus, 'the true envoy am I, in whom is no lie; a vine are we, a vine of life, a tree which cannot lie'<sup>2</sup>; 'a shepherd am I who loves his sheep; I keep watch over my sheep and my lambs .... I bring them into the fold, the good fold, and then with me they find pasture'.<sup>3</sup> And this is a last striking parallel: 'I (Manda d'Haya) desire to go away, to assign Hibil a place in the new chamber, and come then quickly to you'.<sup>4</sup> Is there evidence, here, at last, that the Mandaeans gathered these ideas in Palestine or that Mandaism is a pre-Christian Gnosticism? An answer to the second question may best be reserved till the Baptist traditions in the Mandaean literature have been examined. Meantime it may be noted that it is not imperative to believe that the Mandaeans themselves were connected with Palestine because of the appearance of these conceptions

1. Cf. Bauer: op.cit., p.57.

2. Ginza, Lidzb., pp.59ff., (= G.R., II, 65.).

3. M.Joh.xi.44,45.

4. Cf. Bauer: op.cit., p.178; Ginza, Lidzb., pp.259ff., (= G.R., xi.260). This quotation and the references are taken from Macgregor and Purdy: op.cit., pp.326-327. For the translation of the extracts from the Ginza, and John-Book, see W.F.Howard: London Quarterly Review, Jan., 1927, p.82.

in their literature. They could perfectly naturally have taken over such ideas from the traditions of earlier sects who emanated from the West and who brought with them a common stock of syncretistic ideas and symbolism. The problem seems to be not whether Mandaism itself was a pre-Christian Gnosticism, but rather, whether certain ideas, which the Mandaeans borrowed from others, have any claim to be regarded as such. The vast deposit of literatures of various ages gathered together in the Ginza appears to consist of writings which sprang certainly not from the genuine Mandaean religious community, but which came from other sources into the hands of the Baptist folk of the Euphrates. They translated them, adopting, perhaps, a certain similarity in script and terminology to the originals, and working over them, finally brought them into line with their own distinctive ideas. As Brandt puts it, "It is likely that the Mandaeans welcomed as revealed knowledge whatever their eyes lighted upon so long as it did not contradict their own religious practices, and all this has enriched the genuine Mandaean writings and made them a fairly lush vegetation."<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the afore-going analysis, it may be concluded that the evidence in support of a Western origin of the Mandaean sect seems insufficient. The Mandaeans are rightly, perhaps, to be regarded as a Gnostic sect who have  
 1. Die jüdischen Baptismen, p.146.

lived since the time of their origin in Babylonia, and whose literature shows a curious amalgam of Gnostic, Jewish, Christian, and other elements.<sup>1</sup> It cannot be said precisely at what point of time the sect was founded, but the evidence points on the whole to a late rather than to an early date, probably somewhere between 200-700 A.D..<sup>2</sup> It is unlikely that the Mandaeans themselves had at any time any direct contact with Christianity, although the data suggest that they had come into relation with other sects who had dwelt in an atmosphere, or who had passed through a period of contact with, Christian ideas.

## II.

While it is already evident from the above discussion that the Mandaeans have no real claim to be regarded as descendants of the disciples of John the Baptist, it will be of interest to examine the Baptist material itself in the

1. The Gnostic elements in the Mandaean system have been examined by F.C.Burkitt. Noteworthy are the ideas of the Demiurge, of the ascent of the soul through various "regions", of the messengers who bring knowledge of the truth, and of the soma-sema view of life. Burkitt, himself, thinks that the Mandaeans were heretical Christians, Church and Gnosis, p.105, but the evidence, it would seem, can scarcely support this opinion.
2. The account in the Ginza, Lidzb., p.48, 5ff. (= G.R., ii. 53), and p.52, 3ff., (= G.R., ii.58.) where the Mandaeans trace their origin to the revelation of Anos-Uthra who appeared in Jerusalem at the time of Pilate, and who brought about the death of Jesus and destroyed Jerusalem, is, of course, pure fiction. It has been observed, however, that this legend could not have been invented by the Mandaeans before 200 A.D. about which time Christianity spread to South Babylonia. The origin of the sect seems to lie therefore between 200 and 700 A.D..

Mandaean literature if only to show that this material is secondary to the Gospel accounts, and that it, in turn, in no way points to the Mandaean sect being originally a Nasoraean Baptist group.

The idea of the existence of a Nasoraean Baptist sect, consisting originally of the disciples of John the Baptist, of which Jesus was a member, and whose descendants are to be found in the Mandaeans, has commended itself to several scholars.<sup>1</sup> The evidence, however, on which this bold assumption is built seems to be too slender to support it. The argument is based partly on the mistranslation of the Josephan phrase βαπτισμῷ συνιέναι as "to band together by baptism", and hence "to form a baptismal group or sect",<sup>2</sup> and partly on the appearance in the N.T. of the terms 'Nasoraean', (Ναζωραῖος); and 'Nazarene', (Ναζαρενός), referring to Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Ναζωραῖος, at least, it is maintained, has nothing to do with 'Nazareth' or 'Nazarites', but is to be derived from  $\sqrt{\text{NZR}}$  meaning 'to observe', hence 'Observers'. Lidzbarski maintains that the things observed were either

1. E.g. Bultmann: Z.N.T.W., xxiv, 1925, pp.100-146; Eisler: The Messiah Jesus, pp.231ff.

2. Cf. chapter IV, p.178, note 5.

3. The former at: Matt.2:23, 26:71; Lk.18:37; Jn.18:5,7; Acts 2:22, 3:6, 4:10, 6:14, 22:8, 24:5 (in the plural, not referring to Jesus, but to his followers, 26:9). The latter at: Mk.1:24, 10:47, 14:67, 16:6; Lk.4:34, 24:19. While there can be no doubt as to the duality of the form, Acts shows that Ναζωραῖος was the form which prevailed.

laws or ordinances, or in a wider sense, the holy life,<sup>1</sup> and thinks that the meaning may therefore be "keepers of secrets". As the term 'Nasoraeans' was one used by several ancient sects, and as there is evidence in Acts, in the opinion of the exponents of this theory, indicating that John's disciples maintained their independent existence long after his death, and finally, as the Mandaeans used this very name 'Nasoraeans' of themselves, the connexion between a John the Baptist group and the Mandaeans is, it is held, established. The best part of this statement appears to lie in the suggestion that  $\text{N}\alpha\zeta\omega\epsilon\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma$  has no connection with 'Nazareth'.<sup>2</sup>  $\text{N}\alpha\zeta\omega\epsilon\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma$  from  $\text{N}\alpha\zeta\alpha\rho\epsilon\tau\epsilon$  seems to be a philological impossibility.<sup>3</sup> The term originated very possibly in  $\sqrt{\text{NZR}}$  and means "keepers of secrets", as Lidzbarski holds. The weak part of the statement lies, first, in connecting the term specifically with a fully organised Johannine group, which, as already noted, never existed. 'Nasoraeans' was a form of designation used by a fairly large number of early sects, and curiously enough, appears to have been equivalent at any early date to Chris-

1. Mandäische Liturgien, pp.xviff.

2.  $\text{N}\alpha\zeta\alpha\rho\epsilon\tau\epsilon$ , however, is not an impossible derivation. The best article on the subject is that of Bauer:  $\text{N}\alpha\zeta\omega\epsilon\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma$  in Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterb.zu den Schriften des N.T., coll.839-840.

3. But cf. article by G.F.Moore in Beginnings of Christianity, I, i, p.426. Moore thinks that the form may be explained on the analogy of the common metathesis of the vowels o and u, and points out the variant forms  $\text{Εσσηνός}$  and  $\text{Εσσητός}$ . But  $\text{N}\alpha\zeta\omega\epsilon\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma$  appears to be too remote from  $\text{N}\alpha\zeta\alpha\rho\epsilon\tau\epsilon$  to admit of this explanation.

tians. As used by the early sects, the significance was, no doubt, "keepers of secrets", but this very designation would suggest itself as an admirable one with which to describe the Christians. Thus, by a simple change, 'Nasoraean' would be substituted for 'Nazarenes', and this would well express their habitual guardedness and secrecy: and, second, in assuming that because the Mandaeans, in particular, were called Nasoraean, they are descendants of a Baptist sect whose members used this designation. The use of the term 'Nasoraean' by the Mandaeans may be due rather to one of three following reasons: (a) because they had passed through a period of contact with Christianity,<sup>1</sup> or (b) because they had taken over this designation from neighbouring sects in a period in which Christian ideas were not unfavourable to them, or (c) because, like other sects, they adopted it simply as denoting "keepers of secrets". (a) is excluded, because it is unlikely that Mandaism and Christianity came into direct contact at any period. The solution will therefore lie between (b) and (c), (b) being possible because the polemic against Christianity belongs mainly to the later strata of the Mandaean literature and is, in part, a camouflage; and (c) being not altogether excluded because it fits in so well with the secrecy and seclusion which characterise

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1. So Kessler: P.R.E., xii, 1903, pp.155ff.

the Mandaeans to the present day.

The idea that the Mandaeans are an offshoot of a Nasoraean Baptist Sect has been extended further by Robert Eisler. He thinks that the real ancestors of these people are to be found in the Rechabites, who, like the Mandaeans, were craftsmen - boatbuilders, smiths, gold and silver-smiths, lock-smiths, etc.<sup>1</sup> A further characteristic which all had in common was their abstention from wine. John the Baptist, then, is to be regarded as a descendant of the nomadic sons of Rechab.

Apart from the slender nature of the evidence on which this assumption is based, there is, it would seem, considerable doubt whether the Rechabites retained their independent existence, and their peculiar practices until the time of John the Baptist. In the pre-exilic period it appears that they belonged to the Calebite branch of the Kenites, and that they accompanied the Israelites into Canaan, keeping their nomadic habits, and forbidding agriculture, the use of wine, and the construction of permanent houses.<sup>2</sup> After the exile, however, a Rechabite is to be found engaged in the re-building of a portion of the wall of Jerusalem,<sup>3</sup> while the original tribe seems to have settled at Jabez, and to have taken up scribal work.<sup>2</sup> In view of

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1. *The Messiah Jesus*, pp.234-235.

2. *I.Chron.2:55; II Kings, 10:15.*

3. *Neh.3:14.*

these facts, there is much to be said in favour of the view of Jack<sup>1</sup> that after the exile the Rechabites became incorporated in the tribe of Judah, and discontinued their peculiar practices, while the name alone survived, as it still does. The silence of Josephus is significant, and points in the same direction. If this is so, there are no substantial grounds for tracing a direct line of connection between the Rechabites, a Nasoraean Baptist sect and the Mandaeans.

In the montheistic system of the Mandaeans, the 'King of Light' is the supreme Being. From his person proceed an innumerable array of Uthras or Treasures, the principal of which is Manda d'Haya, the 'Knowledge of Life'. After him follows the emanations Hibil (Abel), Sitil (Seth), Anush (Enosh), and last of all, John the Baptist. Of these Hibil or Hibil-Ziwa is easily the most important, while the younger brother of Hibil, Anush-Uthra, is regarded as the true messenger from heaven as opposed to Jesus who is a false prophet, (Eshu Mshiha). John the Baptist baptises Eshu Mshiha by mistake, baptises Anush-Uthra, and returns clothed in light to the dwelling-place of the King of Light. Anush-Uthra denounces Eshu Mshiha who is crucified by the Jews, and Anush sends forth 365 prophets to teach in his own name and then departs to the Kingdom of Light.

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1. The Historic Christ, p.254.



From this it is evident that the role of John the Baptist in the Mandaean system, though an important one, is by no means the commanding one.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the references to the Baptist all belong to the very latest sections of the Mandaean literature.<sup>2</sup> He is mentioned only once in the original parts of the Ginza,<sup>3</sup> and in the John-Book he frequently bears the Arabic form of the name 'Yahya' as compared with 'Yohana'. Certainly this may indicate no more than that in the redaction of the Mandaean literature, the Arabic form was substituted, and thus no indication is afforded as to the date of earlier writings from which the pieces were copied out.<sup>4</sup> But the general impression conveyed by the Baptist material in the John-Book does not confirm this. It is much more likely that John was brought to the fore in their literature by the Mandaeans themselves at a time when they seemed liable to suffer Muslim persecution through being mistaken for Christians.<sup>5</sup> (circa 600-700 A.D.). The indications already given as to the history of the Mandaeans agree, at least, with this viewpoint.

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1. Loisy: op.cit., p.27, points out that it is very significant that John is not mentioned at all in the Qolasta, i.e. Liturgies. "If John had always occupied a commanding role in the Mandaean tradition, he would not have been neglected thus in the Liturgies."
  2. Cf. Burkitt: Church and Gnosis, pp.100-122.
  3. Cf. Loisy: op.cit., pp.28ff.
  4. Cf. G.R.S.Mead: The Gnostic John, p.35, note 1.
  5. Mead: op.cit., p.123.

Some extracts from the Mandaean literature relating to John the Baptist may now be examined:-

1. The birth of John the Baptist.

"Yahya proclaims in the nights, Yohana on the Night's evenings. Yahya proclaims in the nights and speaks, 'The (heavenly) wheels and chariots quaked. Earth and Heaven weep and the tears of the clouds flow down.'

'My father', says Yahya, 'was 99 and my mother was 88 years old. Out of the basin of Jordan they took me. They bore me up and laid me in the womb of Enishbai (Elizabeth). 'Nine months', said they, 'thou shalt stay in her womb as do all other children.' .... The region of Jerusalem quakes and the wall of the priests rocks. Elizar, the great house, stands there, and his body trembles. The Jews gather together, come unto old father Zakhria and they speak to him, 'O old father Zakhria, thou art to have a son. Tell us now, what name shall we give him? Shall we give him for name, Zatan the Pillar, so that the Jews may swear by him and commit no deceit?' When Enishbai heard this, she cried out and said, 'Of all these names which you name, will I not give him one: but the name Yahya-Yohana will I give him, which Life's self has given him.' When the Jews heard this, they were filled with wicked anger against her and said, 'What weapon shall we make ready for a certain one, (i.e.

Jesus), and his mother that he be slain by our hand?' When Anush, the Treasurer, heard this, he took the child and brought it to Parwan, the white mountain, to Mt.Parwan, on which sucklings and little ones on holy drink are reared up. There I remained until I was 22 years old .... etc."<sup>1</sup>

The impression conveyed by this passage, especially by the particulars regarding the naming of the Baptist, is that it is simply a pure piece of embroidery of the Gospel narrative. The Lucan account, 1:59-63, is shorter, mentions only one alternative name, Zacharias, and is exactly the type of story which would lend itself to further legendary details. The use of the numbers 99, 88, 22, which probably belong to some Gnostic system of mystic psephology, and which may be compared with the 888 value of the name of Christ in the 2nd century system of Gnostic Markos, and the 666 of the Beast of the Apocalypse, point in the same direction.<sup>2</sup>

In connection with the naming of the Baptist, it is convenient to notice at this point attempts which have been made to connect John with the ancient Babylonian fish-clad, fisher-god, Hani-Oannes, who, according to Berossus, the Chaldaean priest who wrote for the Greeks a history of his

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1. M.Joh.xxxii, 115, 6ff. Translation by Mead: op.cit., pp.56-57.
  2. Cf. Mead: op.cit., p.57, note 6; Howard: The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism and Interpretation, p.271.

people, and had taught mankind all the arts of civilisation, rose from the sea in successive periods at the Persian Gulf.<sup>1</sup> As the notion of manifestation and salvation in successive periods is a fundamental tenet of the Mandaeans, the nomenclature of the Baptist is to be explained in this way, and this, in turn, links him up more closely than ever with the Mandaean sect! In support of this contention the Ezra Apocalypse, (end of 1st cent.A.D.), is invoked, in which it is stated that the Redeemer of the World is expected to rise 'from the heart of the ocean'.<sup>2</sup> It is by no means unlikely, therefore, it is held, that the more wildly imaginative of John's followers saw in their master this expected manifestation.

Now, while all due allowance must be made for the allegoristic imagination of the times in which the Baptist flourished, it does not seem that even the very wildest imagination would have connected the Baptist with the Babylonian Oannes. The Baptist had nothing to do with the sea, nor did he instruct his followers in the principles of law, industry, agriculture, and architecture, as the Babylonian Oannes was reputed to have done. In fact, the suggestion that any connection between the two existed in the minds of the Baptist's contemporaries is too absurd to require refuta-

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1. Cf. Eisler, op.cit., passim.

2. II Esdras 13:3, 25-32.

tion, and in this respect may be classed with the equally fantastic attempt to identify John with the wonder-worker Hanan, or the Hidden One.<sup>1</sup>

In the extract under consideration it is to be noted that the statement that John was taken away to Mt. Parwan by Anosh-Uthra seems to be based on certain late Christian Legends inspired by Herod's persecution of the infants.<sup>2</sup> Ishodad, in his Commentary on St. Matthew, is acquainted with four legends describing the Baptist's place of retreat. According to one, Elizabeth fled with the child into the desert. Another had it that an angel took the Baptist from his mother's side, and neither father nor mother knew the place where he had been hidden. Yet another, that John had been led away by the wind into the desert. And a fourth, that after his father had laid him upon the altar in the Temple, an angel took him away into the desert. The Mandaean account seems to be based on the second of these legends. The angel who snatches the child from his mother is the Uthra, who in the John-Book cries, "What woman has a son, who was stolen away?"<sup>3</sup> In both accounts an emanation from heaven takes the child away, and this points to the conclusion that the Mandaean version relies on late legends, and is therefore secondary to the Gospel narrative.

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1. Suggested also by Eisler: op.cit., ibid.

2. Cf. Peterson: Z.N.T.W., xxvii, 1928, p.86.

3. M.Joh. xxxii, 117, 4ff.

## 2. The Baptism of Jesus.

"Yahya proclaims in the nights: Yohana on the Night's evenings. Yahya proclaims in the nights. Glory rises over the worlds. Who told Yeshu (Jesus)? Who told Yeshu Messiah, son of Miryam, who told Yeshu, so that he went to the shore of the Jordan and said unto Yahya, 'Yahya, baptise me with thy baptising, and utter over me the Name thy wont is to utter. If I show myself as thy pupil, I will remember thee in my writing. I attest not myself as thy pupil, then wipe out my name from thy page.'" (Here follows a long passage in which John declares the unfitness of Jesus for baptism, while Jesus protests his fitness. Finally a letter comes out of the house of Abathur, stating), "'Yahya, baptise the deceiver in Jordan. Lead him down into the Jordan and baptise him and lead him up again to the shore and there set him.' Then Ruha, (the Lower Spirit), made herself like to a dove and threw a cross over the Jordan. A cross threw she over the Jordan and made its water to change into various colours. 'O Jordan', she says, 'thou sanctifiest me and thou sanctifiest my seven sons ... The Jordan in which Messiah-Paulis was baptised, have I made into a trough' ..... etc."<sup>1</sup>

The reference in this extract to the 'cross of Light'

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1. M.Joh. xxx,103,9ff., 107,24ff., 108, 6ff. Translation by Mead: op.cit., pp.48, 49, 51.

thrown over the Jordan is reminiscent of the description of the great light which shone on the Jordan at the baptism of Jesus as described in the apocryphal Gospel according to the Hebrews, and also preserved in Tatian's Diatessaron, (2nd half of 2nd cent.). It is not unlikely that the Mandaean account emanated from the same circle of legendary material. The words of Yeshu Messiah: "I will remember thee in my testimony", combined with the expression 'Messiah-Paulis' recall perhaps Marcionite ideas.<sup>1</sup> According to Adamantius<sup>2</sup> some of the Marcionites thought that Jesus himself had composed the Gospel, and that Paul added the description of the death and resurrection of Christ. Now the words, "I will remember thee in my testimony" indicate that Jesus himself had composed the Gospels, while the expression 'Messiah-Paulis' reflects the close collocation of Jesus and Paul in Marcionite thought. It may well be, therefore, that the polemic against Jesus in this section arose in a period when the Mandaeans came into contact with some sect strongly influenced by Marcionite or pseudo-Marcionite ideas, and a similar explanation may be the correct one to account for the sharp contrast which is drawn between John's baptism and Christian baptism. "They, (the Christians), left the living water and went to the lifeless

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1. See further Peterson: art.cit., p.88.

2. De Recta in Deum Fide, i, 8, lff.

water. To the lifeless water they went: they went to the burning flame. They left the living fire: they went and loved the consuming fire. They loved the consuming fire: they loved the burning flame."<sup>1</sup> If sects who lived near the Mandaeans had connected Christ in some way with fire, the Mandaeans may have devised a sharp polemic against Christianity to avoid absorption with these sects - a polemic which was intensified as a safeguard against Muslim persecution. There is nothing in the Mandaean account of the baptism of Jesus which can be regarded as primitive. It is the product of the legend-building imagination and, to use Goguel's phrase, the Baptist here already is a type of "eponymous hero".

### 3. The Marriage of John.

"There came a letter from the house of Abathur: 'Yahya take a wife and found a family, and see that thou dost not let this world come to an end ....' Thereupon they fashioned for Yahya a wife out of thee, thou Region of the Faithful. From the first conception were Handan and Sharrath born. From the middle conception were Birham and R'himath-Haiye born. From the last conception were Nsab, Sam, Anhar-Ziwa < and Sharrath > born. These three conceptions took place in thee, O Ruins, Jerusalem."<sup>2</sup>

1. Ginza, Lidzb., p.69, 17-24, (= G.R., iii.73.).

2. M.Joh. xxxi, 110, 13ff. Translation by Mead: op.cit., p.53.



#### 4. Length of John's Ministry.

"Then answered John Manda d'Haya: 'Forty-two years did I take the Jordan, and baptise the people in water, but yet no one has called me to Jordan.'<sup>1</sup>

Then all his followers raised their voice as one and said to John: 'For forty-two years have you performed your baptism and yet no one has called you to Jordan except this small boy.'<sup>2</sup>

#### 5. An extract from John's preaching.

"Yahya proclaims and speaks: 'Ye nobles who lie there, ye ladies who will not awaken - ye who lie there, what will ye do on the day of judgment? When the soul strips off the body on Judgment day, what will ye do? O thou distracted jumbled-up world in ruin! Thy men die, and thy false scriptures are closed. Where is Adam, the first man, who was here, head of the aeon? ... The Last Day is like a feast-day for which the aeons and the worlds are waiting. The Planets are like fatted oxen who stand there for the day of slaughter. The children of this world are like fat rams who stand in the markets for sale. But as for my friends who pay homage to Life, their sins and transgressions will be forgiven them.'<sup>3</sup>

1. Ginza, Lidzb., p.191, 32ff. (= B.R., v.190.).

2. Ginza, Lidzb., p.192, 7ff. (= G.R., v.191.).

3. M.Joh.xxv, 92, 27ff. Translation by Mead: op.cit., pp.45-46.

## 6. John's death.

"When Manda d'Haya heard this ... he removed John's covering in Jordan, he removed his covering of flesh and blood, he clothed him in brilliant raiment and bedecked him with a good clean garment of Light.

Manda d'Haya began his journey to the region where all is brightness, to the region where Light is, and John went with him. The fish of the sea, and the birds on both banks of the World Sea gathered around the body of John and covered it. When John perceived his body, he was grieved. Then spake Manda d'Haya to John, 'Why grievest thou over flesh and blood which I removed from thee? If thou wilt I will lead thee back to the same.' Then spake John to Manda d'Haya, 'Blessed and praised be the man who removed my garment of flesh and blood, who freed and set me at liberty from it. Praised, honoured, esteemed and glorified, be the chosen man who has clothed me with the dress of brightness and has bedecked me with the good clean garment of Light in which I was. No! I was grieved over my children, who are full of envy, whom I must leave behind, and no one is there to care for them.'<sup>1</sup>

These four extracts may be grouped together as illustrating how different the Mandaean John is from the Gospel

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1. Ginza, Lidzb., p.193, 26-194, 10 (= G.R., v.193.).

John. No.3 shows the violent hostility of the Mandaeans towards celibacy, which is also apparent in other sections of their literature. With little regard for historical facts, they make John the father of eight, and the family life of their hero is the type of family life which they extolled. No.4 reveals another gross historical inaccuracy. There may be some mystic symbolism in the number 42 which suggested this particular period for the length of John's ministry. No.5 shews that the content of the preaching of the Mandaean John is different from that of the Gospel John. In the Gospels the emphasis is laid upon repentance: here Yahya contents himself with drawing a melancholy picture of the wickedness of the world. No.6 is a pure flight of the legendary imagination. The hero on earth must receive a fitting glorification after his death.

The combined impression conveyed by these passages makes it hard to believe that they are anything more than imaginative products of the Mandaean fancy. One thing, at least, is tolerably certain: the Mandaeans can scarcely be regarded as descendants of the Gospel John. The life-story of their hero is quite different from the Gospel story, whereas true descendants of John would have treasured correctly, if not the exact details, at least, the general outline of the life of their master.

## 7. The Condemnation of Jesus.

"I will destroy and rebuild my palace."<sup>1</sup>

Reitzenstein believes that this expression, which closely resembles that attributed to Jesus at Mk.14:57 and Matt.26:60, is anterior to and explanatory of the Gospel one. Without detailed examination of the verses in question, it may be taken that Jesus had declared that in his capacity of Son of Man he would destroy the Temple, and replace it by another i.e. he would overthrow the existing religious economy of Judaism and put a new economy in its place. This idea, Reitzenstein holds, is peculiarly Mandaean, coming from John the Baptist, because it was as a disciple of John the Baptist that Jesus was condemned by the Sanhedrin. The same idea appears also in a Manichaean fragment of the Turfan, "I can destroy this palace made by the hand of man and in three days I will build up that which is not made by the hand of man." These conceptions, in Reitzenstein's opinion, cannot be explained as due to the influence of the Gospel expression, because, whereas the Gospels use the word 'temple', the Mandaean and the Manichaean sources employ the word 'palace', which, for the Mandaeans means both 'body' and 'universe'. The Mandaean expression "I will destroy and rebuild my palace" denotes therefore the destruc-

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1. M.Joh.lxxvi.242,11.

tion and the renewal of the world - a very ancient idea, and perfectly intelligible without the help of the Christian expression. In fact, the Mandaean formula explains the<sup>1</sup> Christian one.

All this, however, is scarcely so self-evident as Reitzensteon believes. The point is taken exceedingly well by Goguel, "It is not certain that the relation between the evangelical and the Manicho-Mandaean formulae is so close as Reitzenstein supposes ... The Manicho-Mandaean idea is that of cosmic renewal. Jesus, without doubt, also expected this renewal, but this idea was so widespread in the milieu in which he lived, that it would be rash to say that it could be attributed to John the Baptist only .... While the formula of the John-Book expresses an idea of very general character, ~~the~~ declaration of Jesus is related to a very particular historical situation, namely, the conflict between Jesus and Judaism. It is possible that the Manichaeans, who knew the Christian tradition, were inspired by the formula used by Jesus to express thereby their theory of the renewal of the world, but in this, only an exterior contact, without significance, is to be seen, and when we consider the respective dates of the documents, we can only think that it would be precarious to pretend to

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1. Acknowledgment is due here to Goguel: Jean-Baptiste, pp.132ff.

explain the idea of Jesus by the very hypothetical construction of such a doctrine of John the Baptist."<sup>1</sup>

It is along similar lines, perhaps, that an account can be given for the similarities of terminology and conception in the Fourth Gospel and the Mandaean literature. Close as they often are, the priority seems to lie not on the Mandaean, but on the Christian side. The terminology and ideas were no doubt widespread, but they reached the Mandaeans only "as echoes of a world-thought in which the Fourth Evangelist habitually lived."<sup>2</sup> During their journey to Babylonia, as they became further and further removed from the area in which they originally circulated, the ideas lost very considerably their original vitality and power and inward depth. They were gradually interwoven into an intricate network of mythology and symbolism, and became in the end "not so much verbal parallels to those contained in the Fourth Gospel, as rather interesting and sometimes close analogues, acting upon the mind like cues which by association of ideas prompt the recall of more familiar passages."<sup>3</sup> It is impossible to determine how far this process was carried out by the Mandaeans themselves, and how far it was done by other sects from whom the Mandaeans borrowed their ideas. There can be little doubt, however, that both factors are to

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1. Op.cit., pp.134-135.

2. Vincent Taylor: Hibbert Journal, xxviii, 1930, p.545.

3. Vincent Taylor: art.cit., p.539.

be taken into account, and the net result was a mysticism far more mystifying than the Fourth Gospel itself.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Some of Bultmann's parallels between the Fourth Gospel and the Mandaean literature, Z.N.T.W., xxiv, 1925, pp.100ff., are given here.

(A) Jn.1:1-3. 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.'  
Lit., Lidzb., lxxvi, 134, 16. "Praise to the most ancient one, (or, the first of all), the Son of the first Great Life."  
Ginza, Lidzb., p.70, 1 (= G.R., iii.73.). "Before the Uthras existed, has the Great Life created and appointed thee."

(B) Jn.8:16. 'And yet, if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father who sent me.'

8:29. 'And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone: for I do always these things which please him.'

10:30. 'I and my Father are one.'  
Ginza, Lidzb., p.68, 13ff. (= G.R.iii.72.). When Manda d'Haya asks the great Mana: "If I seek thee whom will I behold? If I am in trouble, in whom shall I trust? Whereon shall I support my soul which was with thee?", he receives this comfort: "Thou shalt not be cut off from us: it is our desire much more to be with thee. All that thou sayest is valid for us. Thou art established with us, and shalt not be cut off from us. We are with thee, for Life is full of good for thee."

Ginza, Lidzb., p.296, 37ff. (= B.R., xv.299.):-

"Vex thyself and fear not  
 And say not: There I stand alone,  
 If troubles befall thee  
 We shall all be with thee."

(C) Jn.5:27. 'And hath given him authority to execute judgment also because he is the son of Man.'

17:9. 'I pray for them: I pray not for the world but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine.'  
Ginza, Lidzb., p.70, 3ff. (= G.R., iii.73.). "The Great One has created and appointed thee: equipped thee, and appointed thee, sent thee thither, and given thee full power over everything."

In conclusion, it only remains to notice a few more general features of the Mandaeans and their literature, which, in turn, in no way suggest that their tradition is primitive, or that they are genuine descendants of John the Baptist. In addition to their weak grasp of history in calling Pilate, "King of the World", may be added the thoroughly unhistorical way in which the destruction of Jerusalem is related.<sup>1</sup> Nothing is said about the Roman War. Coupled with historical

(Note cont. from previous page).

(D) Jn.3:19. 'And this is the condemnation, that Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than Light, because their deeds were evil.'

8:12. 'Then spake Jesus again unto them saying: I am the Light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' Ginza, Lidzb., p.57, 33ff. (= G.R., ii.64.). "I, the Envoy of Light, the King, who went thither from the Light, came, with communion and power in my hand, light and praise upon me, brightness and brilliancy around me, and the sign and the baptism upon me, and I enlightened the dark hearts."

Ginza, Lidzb., p.58, 23ff. (= G.R., ii.64.):-

"The Envoy of Light am I;

He who smells his fragrance, receives Life.

He who accepts his words,

His eyes fill with Light."

(E) Jn.15:1. 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.'

Ginza, Lidzb., p.59, 39ff. (= G.R. ii.65.). 'A vine branch are we, the vine of Life in which there is no deceit.'

(F) Jn.12:31-32. 'Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.'

Ginza, Lidzb., p.435, 35ff. (= G.L.i. 16.17.). When Adam rises up and all his descendants follow him, then "all generations end, and all creation ceases. All springs and pools dry up, and rivers and brooks fail. Mountains and hills will be shattered, fall, and sink down..."



errors is a very patent weakness in geography.<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem is described as being situated on the banks of the River Jordan. Again, fasting and celibacy are both abhorrent to the Mandaeans, while their repeated baptisms for ritual purposes are quite different from the single baptism of John with its moral significance. All this goes to show that there is no real connection between the Mandaeans and the followers of John, and that the true historical facts have in their transit to Babylonia become distorted and enveloped by degrees in a fog of mythological symbolism and fancy.

It is evident that discussion and controversy over the Mandaean problem are by no means at an end. Yet, as far as can be judged at present, it seems that the attempt to establish a Western origin for the Mandaeans, to see in them descendants of the followers of John the Baptist, and even to discover in their literature traces of a pre-Christian Gnosticism have failed. The data on which critics like Bauer and Bultmann rely do not support their contentions conclusively. As far as the Baptist is concerned, it seems

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(Note cont. from previous page).

When the earth falls in ruins, the heaven stands there without stars ... All wicked ones fall into deep darkness: therefore, all hail! Adam, because thou wast chosen and risest out of the world of (evil) angels, and out of the sorrow of the world."

There are many other so-called parallels, but surely the Mandaean sayings have not the same vitality and freshness as those of the Fourth Gospel!

1. (p.241). Ginza, Lidzb., pp.342-4 (= G.R.xv.332-3.)
1. (p.242). M.Joh.xxi,86,14.

clear, as Lagrange puts it, "that the Mandaeans say nothing about him that bears resemblance to a peculiar historical tradition."<sup>1</sup> In view of the lateness of the material relating to John in the Mandaean writings, it is likely that he was adopted by them as a kind of "eponymous hero" at a time when they were in danger of Muslim persecution. The inaccuracy of the details suggests that the data may have passed through several hands before reaching the Mandaeans themselves.

Neither by working forward from the Gospels, nor backwards from the Mandaeans, is any cogent evidence to be found in favour of the existence of a continuing Baptist sect. However interesting the idea of the existence of such may be, it seems to be only an idea, and not borne out by the facts of history.

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1. Revue Biblique, xxxvii, 1928, pp.5-36; to this may be added the judgment of Loisy: op.cit., p.45, "The Mandaean writings throw no light upon the problem of John the Baptist, because they add nothing to the knowledge of John gained from other sources."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

The point has now been reached at which it is desirable to examine what light is thrown upon John the Baptist by his outlook and his teaching. As it is impossible to do justice to a historical figure without taking into account the conditions of the times in which he lived, and above all, the influences which would be likely to mould the content of his thought, it is necessary to consider the background against which the Baptist began his ministry.

(a) Political conditions:<sup>1</sup> Shortly after the beginning of the Christian era, Palestine was divided up between the sons of Herod the Great. They owed their position to the Emperor, and their tenure of office depended partly on Imperial favour, and partly on their own capabilities for good administration. The real power lay, however, with the Roman procurators, and under their jurisdiction the political liberty of the Jews was at an end. It was only natural that some should have resented Roman overlordship, and longed for a return of political independence, but it appears that in the main the people were not greatly roused against the new regime. The Roman overlordship was probably beneficent

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1. Cf. Schürer: A History of the Jewish People, I, vol.ii, pp.1-79.

rather than the reverse, and the Romans generally allowed the Jews a large measure of freedom in religious matters. It is possible that in Galilee and Perea where Herod Antipas seems to have enjoyed a larger measure of autonomy than his brothers, the advantages of the Roman suzerainty were not so fully felt as in Judea and elsewhere. It is significant that Galilee witnessed a political uprising against constituted authority in the unsuccessful attempt of Judas and his followers. Upheavals of this type were, however, comparatively rare, and it would not be too much to say, that, although dissatisfaction did exist, there was no real desire, except in special cases, to overthrow by drastic action the Imperial government, which made for a calmer and a better social order. Klausner's picture of "wars, rebellions, outbreaks, and riots and all of them, with their concomitant of incessant bloodshed"<sup>1</sup> is almost certainly overdrawn, and a similar criticism may be applied to his statement, "At this time .... none dare take part in political matters or adopt a definite attitude to the fortunes of his miserable but beloved fatherland; he might not even utter his ideas aloud. Spies were everywhere and the police held the population in subjection: all alike were down-trodden and overcome by fear."<sup>2</sup> In fact, it is likely that many of the

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1. Jesus of Nazareth, p.167.

2. Ibid.

Jews who joined in the war against Rome in 70 A.D. were swept in against their principles by circumstances beyond their control.

(b) Moral and social conditions: It is difficult to form a correct estimate of the moral conditions of this period, partly because of the paucity of the evidence, and partly because the evidence which we do possess is either from the political point of view or from the standpoint of the moralist himself. Josephus gives a lurid picture of court life, but says little about the conditions of the people in general. Jesus and John the Baptist, as moralists, vigorously denounced the sins of the times, but, if Montefiore is right, these denunciations should not be made to form the basis of too sweeping generalisations.<sup>1</sup> Certainly it cannot be doubted that there was much which was vulgar and sordid, as might be expected where a mixed population and unsatisfactory housing conditions existed. Greed, oppression and immorality were common, and the influence of Hellenism, however stubbornly the Jews resisted it, made itself felt to some extent, at least, in impairing the rigidity of former standards. Tremendous contrasts of wealth and poverty would also have a disturbing effect - the Pharisees and the Sadducees, at the one extreme, the former, probably wealthy merchants,

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1. Hibbert Lectures, 1892, pp.489ff.

the latter, aristocratic landowners; and at the other extreme, peasants, artisans and slaves ground down by excessive taxation, debtors' laws, and laws of inheritance. Equally disturbing must have been the unsatisfactory system of education, wherein legalism was unduly stressed which regulated the activities of the individual by ordinances covering the minutest details of ordinary life. Little room was left for the expansion of character, and conduct tended to become divorced from conscience and religious ideals. Yet, it cannot be said that the moral conditions in Palestine in this period were nearly so bad as those in Rome, for example, nor that they were much worse than in the pre-exilic period. Still, it is not surprising that in view of the conditions described, various pietistic and reformatory movements sprang up, whose aim it was either to withdraw from the world to a life of seclusion, or to challenge the world with a demand for repentance.

(c) Religious conditions: It is possible to form a clearer picture of the religious conditions of this time than of the moral and social conditions. One of the most unmistakable lines in this picture was the Messianic hope. Opinions differed as to the nature of the Messiah, according as Jewish or Hellenistic influences predominated. Some believed that the Messiah would be a King of David's line

who would invest with new brilliancy the throne of Jerusalem; others spoke of a World-Redeemer who would bring in a period of happiness and peace; still others believed in a descent from heaven of a Redeemer surrounded by angels - an idea embodying Oriental notions. Practically all who entertained the Messianic hope thought that the New Age would be one of bliss and prosperity, as distinct from the hardships and misery of their present lot. 'Happy to live in those days and to see the glory of the Lord.'<sup>1</sup> 'Then wilt thou be happy, O Israel, and God will exalt thee, and bring thee to the starry sphere.'<sup>2</sup> 'The Light of Days will abide upon them, and glory and honour will turn to the Holy.'<sup>3</sup> It is instructive to observe precisely what attitude the Herodians, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the Zealots and the so-called People of the Land adopted towards this Messianic Hope, and it is by considering their attitude towards this, and their outlook in general, that the ministry of John the Baptist may be sharply set against its religious background.

The Herodians, as their name indicates, were champions of the Herodian government. Though not definitely opposed to the suzerainty of Rome, their ambition was to see the forfeited provinces of Judea, Samaria and Idumaea once more under the rule of the Herods. They welcomed Hellenic influences and

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1. Ps.Sol.18:6, Kautzsch,ii,p.148.

2. Asc.of Moses, 10:8,9, Kautzsch,ii,pp.327-328.

3. Enoch, 50:1, Kautzsch,ii,p.254.

in consequence bitterly hated the Messianic hope with its eschatological ideas. It is very likely that Josephus in his earlier years, at all events, shared the views of the Herodian party, and it is possible that his silence regarding the apocalyptic elements in the Baptist's preaching may be due, to some extent, to his political sympathies.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees may be conveniently taken together. Their names throw little light upon their origin. Pharisee is derived from the Hebrew "parash" and the usual interpretation is that the Pharisees were the "Separated Ones"<sup>1</sup>. Sadducee is probably connected with Zadok, the priest, whose descendants filled the office of priesthood after the exile. This view is more acceptable than to regard the name as derived from "Zaddik" = "righteous", or from another Zadok, who was a disciple of Antigonus of Soko, and a fellow-disciple of Boethus.<sup>2</sup> On what grounds the Pharisees and the Sadducees formed two distinct parties in this period is not clear. It is generally assumed that the division hinged on religious matters, the Pharisees being progressive and liberal, the Sadducees, conservative and narrow. Others believe that political divisions divided the two parties, the

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1. An alternative meaning of "parash" might be "to distinguish". Hence the view that the Pharisees were the "Exegetes" or the "Precisians". Cf. Moore: Judaism, vol.i, p.62.

2. Cf. Blakiston: John the Baptist, p.167, and note 202.



Pharisees being non-political, the Sadducees aiming at independence from foreign influence. Finkelstein, however, has recently suggested that the cleavage was due to social conditions, since the Sadducees bitterly disliked the success of their rivals in winning over wealthy landowners to their group.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, while political and social factors cannot be left entirely on one side, there is much to be said, it would seem, in favour of the traditional view, because, to contemporary Judaism the most impressive feature about these parties was the divergence they displayed in their religious beliefs.

It is not necessary to give here a full statement of the tenets of these parties.<sup>2</sup> Suffice it to say that while both Pharisees and Sadducees were agreed that the life of the individual must be regulated by the Law of Moses, they differed as to what the Law precisely was. Broadly speaking, the Sadducees held that the Law consisted of the Law of Moses only, while the Pharisees conceived it as embracing not only the Law of Moses but the whole Scriptures together with certain regulations not actually written in the Law, but which were delivered by tradition. Thus the broad basis of distinction was that whereas the Sadducees accepted the Law of Moses only, the Pharisees accepted both Law, (the whole Scrip-

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1. Harvard Theological Review, vol.xxii, No.3, 1929, pp.185ff.

2. A full statement appears in Schürer: op.cit., II, vol.ii, pp.10-43.

tures), and Tradition as authoritative. It will readily be realised that in both systems, and, in particular, in that of the Pharisees, the tendency would be to overstress legalism at the expense of morality, and, although the Pharisees won the day because they were more liberal than the Sadducees, the Sadducees did not give up the field without sharply attacking the laborious doctrinal and legal developments which their rivals evolved from the rabbinical comments on the Law. Again, in their attitude to the Messianic hope, Pharisee and Sadducee probably differed. Of the Pharisees, Josephus writes, "Every soul, they maintain, is imperishable, but the soul of the good alone passes into another body"<sup>1</sup> and of the Sadducees, "As for the persistence of the soul after death, penalties in the underworld and rewards, they will have none of them."<sup>2</sup> True, the historian says nothing directly here about the Messianic hope, but from the latter statement it is natural to deduce that the Sadducees were antagonistic to Messianic eschatology, unless, of course, Josephus is overstating matters. The Pharisees, on the other hand, as may be judged from the Psalms of Solomon and the Book of Jubilees, which are both from a Pharisaic hand, did share in the Messianic hope, and in the opinion of the more moderate members of the party, the Messiah would be a King of David's line, and a period of great happiness would

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1. B.J., ii.8.14.(163).

2. B.J., ii.8.14.(165).

begin. Yet, for the Pharisees, the Messianic hope can scarcely have been central, but only subordinate. It is quite unlikely that with their interest devoted to the Law, and to the regulation of conduct by casuistical interpretation of the Law, their outlook extended beyond the immediate present as a general rule. At any rate, it is safe to assume that their Messianic hope was not of the type calculated to inspire in the majority of them thoughts of armed resistance against constituted authority.

As opposed to the moderate line taken by the Pharisees in general, the Zealots,<sup>1</sup> who are to be regarded as an extremist Pharisaic group, believed that armed resistance and force formed the only means of achieving their ideals. The name comes from the Greek word "Zelotes", connected with the Syriac "Kanenyeh" = "zealous". In Mk.3:18, and Matt.10:4, Simon the Apostle is called the 'Cananaean', but this does not mean 'a descendant of Canaan', but the 'Zealot' or 'the zealous one' as Lk.6:5, and Acts 1:13 show. It is not certain when the Zealots as a party arose, but it is probable that Josephus is referring to them in his account of the revolution of Judas of Galilee against the Roman census in 6-7 A.D., although the name 'Zealot' does not actually appear.<sup>2</sup> This is all the more likely inasmuch as the historian regards Judas as the founder of a fourth philosophic sect among the

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1. Cf. Schürer: op.cit., I, vol.ii, p.80, 177-178, 227-230.

2. Antiq.xviii.1.1.(1ff.); B.J.ii.8.1.(117ff.).

Jews, a sect of whose doctrines he writes, "While they agree in all other respects with the Pharisees, they have an invincible passion for liberty and take God as their only Leader and Lord."<sup>1</sup> In the Gospels, beyond the reference to Simon, there is no clear mention of the party, although there are strong indications which point to their existence at that period.<sup>2</sup> On the whole, it may be taken, that at the time of John the Baptist there did exist a group of people, who, in their zeal for a theocracy and in their furious hatred of the Roman suzerainty, were not content with peaceable measures to achieve their end, but pressed for agitation and revolution whenever a suitable opportunity presented itself.

Finally, the so-called 'People of the Land' or 'Ammê-ha-'Areq, must be taken into account.<sup>3</sup> It is usual to refer to them by the latter name, since the English rendering of the Hebrew is rather misleading. The term does not mean agricultural workers, though many of these were undoubtedly 'Ammê-ha-'Areq, nor does it denote the poor as contrasted with the rich, nor the humble and pious over against the arrogant and wicked. The significance of the term is best understood when it is contrasted with another term, Haberim, or Assoc-

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1. Antiq.xviii.1.6.(23).

2. Cf. Matt.11:12; Mk.15:7; Jn.18:40.( ληστῆς ).

3. Cf. Montefiore: Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings, pp.3-15, with bibliography and references.

iates. The latter represented a group of the Pharisees who prided themselves on their strict observance of certain traditions, and pledged themselves to keep them. Chief among these traditions were the payment of tithes from foods, and the observance of elaborate rules relating to cleanness and uncleanness. As a result of these practices, social distinctions sprang up, and the Associates gave themselves superior airs as an educated and intellectual group as opposed to the ignorant and uneducated 'Ammê-ha-'Areq, with whom they had no dealings. It was among the 'Ammê-ha-'Areq, however, that the Messianic hope was most fondly cherished. As Dibelius puts it, "Here lay the real sphere of influence of the coming reformatory movements .... The preaching of John and Jesus could only find receptive hearers where religion was still full of anticipation, where piety was still full of longing, where Hellenistic influences had not taken possession of the mind, and where the Law had not silenced all questions and desires of the heart."<sup>1</sup> The 'Ammê-ha-'Areq were not politically minded, and in the apocalyptic literature which emanated from their circles, there is a spirit of calm and hopefulness. They seem to have accepted existing conditions in silence and to have awaited the coming of the Messianic Kingdom with patience, although their attitude varied as to how the Kingdom would be inaugurated.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Op.cit., p.131.

2. Cf.Box: Journal of Theological Studies, vol.xiii, pp.321-338.

It was against this background in which Law and Hope predominated, in which political, moral, social and religious issues were now closely interwoven, now kept more or less apart, that John the Baptist began his ministry. What part did the Baptist play in this weltering environment? Did he, like the Zealots, advocate active resistance against constituted authority, or did he sharply dissociate himself from political aims? What was his attitude to the parties and the thought of his day, and wherein lay his own contribution?

On examination of the external evidence relating to John the Baptist, it was seen that no weight can be attached to the Slavonic Fragments which seem to make him a revolutionary.<sup>1</sup> It was also suggested that while Josephus rightly attributes the Baptist's arrest to political reasons, the Baptist was not in reality in favour of political agitation, but that he came into conflict with the authorities undesignedly. It now remains to substantiate this viewpoint.

That John the Baptist came into conflict with the authorities undesignedly is not surprising if the rigour of the Roman administration is borne in mind. Although there is no reason to believe, as Eisler does, that John bade the people "band together by baptism" ( βαπτισμῷ συνιέναι ),<sup>2</sup> yet the very fact of his attracting crowds around him, however innocuous the purpose, may have caused the authorities some concern.

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1. Cf. chapter I, pp. 21 ff.

2. Cf. chapter IV, p. 178 note 5.

The Imperial Government was very suspicious of all kinds of gatherings which might in any way constitute a danger to the state, and one recalls the rather amusing anxiety which Pliny displays in asking Trajan whether a local fire-brigade would come under this category.<sup>1</sup> Certainly the conditions at the end of the first century were much stricter than at the beginning, but it is at least possible that Herod Antipas, who owed his position to Rome, and his satellites were acting on strict instructions to break up gatherings which assumed the proportions of that of John the Baptist.

Again, it will be readily realised that the eschatological elements in the Baptist's preaching would do nothing to endear him either to the Romans or to the Herodians. Yet, to judge from the Gospels, he presented his case harmlessly enough. There is nothing in his sermon as reported by Luke which can be interpreted in any other way than as supporting a non-political programme. The crucial words are these, 'And soldiers, (στρατευόμενοι), also asked him saying, And what must we do?' The Baptist replies, 'Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your pay.'<sup>2</sup> Eisler's suggestion that a more exact rendering of στρατευόμενοι would be 'persons on the war-path' or 'going to war'<sup>3</sup> does not

1. Correspondence with Trajan, xxxiii, xxxiv.

2. Lk. 3:14.

3. Op.cit., p.265. If Lk. had meant people of this kind he would have written στασιασταί or στασιάζοντες, not στρατευόμενοι. Cf. Mand M.: Vocabulary of the Greek Testament, p.592b.

seem probable. The utmost that can be said of this idea is that John's audience may have included "revolutionary champions of liberty who had flocked to the Baptist from Judea."<sup>1</sup> If this be so, Eisler continues, the correct interpretation of the passage is this, viz., "that the revolutionaries are receiving an exhortation from their military chaplain, the Baptist, to help each other out as comrades-in-arms, as far as possible!"<sup>2</sup> But there is nothing in John's words to justify this view. The real situation was quite different. The revolutionaries, like everybody else, had heard of John's preaching, and perhaps some of them may have hastened to his side, hoping that they might find among the crowds who flocked to his baptism new recruits for their policy of active resistance. Instead of this, however, the hotheads would have found that the Baptist had nothing to say in favour of agitation and revolution, but that he enjoined upon them, as upon the regular soldiers, precepts for proper conduct. John was not concerned with political issues at all: the whole emphasis of his teaching lay upon the need for changed lives in view of the approach of the Coming One.

Notwithstanding, the Baptist's position was a dangerous one. Religious issues were so often bound up with political issues in this period that the authorities would find it very difficult to distinguish the harmless from the harmful type

1. Op.cit., ibid.

2. Op.cit., p.266.



of movement. Josephus narrates that, at this time, there was a succession of prophets who as "deceivers and imposters under the pretence of divine inspiration, fostering revolutionary changes, persuaded the multitude to act like madmen, and led them out into the desert under the belief that God would there give them tokens of deliverance."<sup>1</sup> Some saw the Messiah in Judas of Galilee, others in Simon Magus and Dositheus, still others in the "prophet" Theudas, or the "bandit" Eleazar. It is highly probable, too, that some of John's hearers whose enthusiasm outstripped their logic, were for regarding the Baptist himself during his lifetime as the Messiah. But this, of course, was only a passing fancy, and disappeared with his death just as quickly as the parallel belief in the other false Messiahs. There is no real indication that John himself ever made Messianic claims. He appears, on the contrary, to have devoted no little energy to dispelling this idea, and the passage in the Fourth Gospel<sup>2</sup> which describes his efforts in this direction is almost certainly genuine, and for this reason: John systematically denies that he is 'that prophet', 'Elijah' or 'the Christ'. It is almost inconceivable that the passage is wholly unauthentic, (though the Evangelist is obviously presenting the episode as part of the general conflict between Judaism and Christianity), inasmuch as no

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1. B.J., ii.13.4.(259.) Cf. Bultmann: Jesus and the Word, p.22.  
 2. 1:19ff.

Christian would ever have put these words into John's mouth in view of the fact that Jesus Himself had identified John with Elijah.<sup>1</sup> But there need be no surprise that Josephus states that "Herod deemed it far better to forestall and kill John, before some sedition arose through him."<sup>2</sup> The government did not, as a rule, make any distinction between political and non-political movements of a Messianic character; and, indeed, they could not have been expected to do so in an environment in which so many currents and cross-currents existed.

There is, then, no reliable evidence pointing to the conclusion that the Baptist had any political aims, nor that he had any leanings towards the programme drawn up by Judas of Galilee. At the same time it cannot be doubted that his ministry caused certain political repercussions. It is precarious, perhaps, to fasten upon any one feature in particular which would involve him in a clash with constituted authority. It may have been the size of the crowds he attracted, his Messianic teaching, the fact that some of the more ardent of his hearers believed that he himself was the Messiah, or simply the inability of the government to distinguish between Zealots and non-political leaders. At any rate, it may well be believed that John's outspoken criticism

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1. Cf. chapter VI, pp. 373 ff.

2. Cf. chapter I, p. 15.

of the morals of Herod stamped the Baptist as a definitely objectionable, if not already dangerous figure, and brought matters speedily to their tragic climax.

It is now time to examine the content of the Baptist's ministry, a ministry of which unfortunately only the barest details are given by the Gospels and Josephus. The material is divided into two parts, (a) John's view of the Kingdom and the Messiah, and (b) John's ethical teaching.

(a) There can be no doubt that John the Baptist ardently entertained a certain type of Messianic hope. His baptism was in reality a demand for change of life in view of the approaching baptism of a Coming One, and his preaching as reported by Matthew and, in part, by Luke, was inspired quite unmistakably by the same expectation. Matthew represents John as saying, 'Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.'<sup>1</sup> It may be doubted whether John actually used the set expression 'The Kingdom of Heaven'. It does not occur in the Old Testament, nor does it appear to have been used more than once in apocalyptic literature.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the expression may perhaps be an editorial note suggested by its

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1. 3:2.

2. In II Baruch 11:2, Kautzsch, ii. p. 455. But "Thy Kingdom", "His Kingdom", "The Kingdom", appear frequently in the O.T. Apocrypha. Cf. Kautzsch, ii, p. 129.

frequent use by Jesus. Otto takes it in this way, and thinks that the idea of a coming Kingdom of God was entirely foreign to the thought of John the Baptist. "If", he writes, "an account of the coming Kingdom of God had been present originally in the early records about John, it would have been impossible to suppress it later, for that account is just what would have shewn him to be Christ's forerunner and pathmaker."<sup>1</sup> Thus, for Otto, the fundamental distinction between John and Jesus was that John spoke only of the Day of Yahweh, i.e. the Day of Judgment, whereas Jesus replaced this idea by the preaching of the Kingdom of God. It must be admitted that ~~this~~ view is, in certain respects, attractive, and that it contains a very considerable element of truth. But it seems that the distinction is put in too clearcut a manner. The absence of any direct mention of the "Kingdom of Heaven", if Matt. 3:2 is not genuine, should occasion no great surprise, in view of the very fragmentary records of John's teaching. It appears however that the idea of the Kingdom does seem to underlie the Baptist's words, 'He will gather his wheat into his garner.' A more serious objection to Otto's hard and fast distinction is, perhaps, that it fails to do justice to the complexity of Jewish thought on the Kingdom, and thereby does not allow sufficiently for the probability that for John, no less than Jesus, the idea of

1. The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man, p.69.

the Kingdom was integral to his teaching. This last point calls for some elaboration.

On the subject of the Kingdom Jewish thought presents considerable complexity.<sup>1</sup> The idea is rooted in O.T. prophecy, and it is possible, perhaps, to distinguish two main lines of thought. The first was theocratic and national, according to which the pious Jew looked forward to a Good Time for Israel, a Time in which the monarchy would be restored, and the Messianic King would be of David's line.<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, this was not the actual Kingdom, but the period of the realisation of the Kingdom, whereas the Kingdom itself was the Sovereignty of God in this Good Time. The second was purely theocratic, according to which the Kingdom was envisaged as the Sovereignty of God over all the world, and the universality of religion.<sup>3</sup> Fundamental, then, to both lines of thought was the Sovereignty of God, the difference being as to whether there would or would not be a national Messiah. Upon this original Jewish substratum of thought was imposed a layer of Persian thought, the origins of which, as Otto has shewn,<sup>4</sup> "lie ... in the prehistoric period of Aryan religion, viz., in the Asura religion." As

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1. Cf. Smith: The Religion of Israel, chapters xiv and xv; E.Biblica, ii, colls.1335-1390; Hasting's D.B., i, pp.734-756.

2. Is. 9:6-7, 19-24.

3. Is. 45:23; Ps.94, 103, 114; Ps.Sol. 17; Kautzsch, ii, p.144.

4. Op.cit., pp.20-33; cf. Bousset, Die Religion des Judentums, pp.577ff.

yet the idea of the Kingdom was not associated with eschatology. This connection was apparently first made by Zoroaster, and from that time was greatly developed and extended. According to the Persian view, the present world would be destroyed by fire, and after its destruction there would come a New Age in which the righteous would obtain their rewards. The clearest expression of this viewpoint appears in 4 Ezra, and the same idea runs through Baruch, and is perhaps reflected in I Cor. 15, and Rev. 19. It seems that Jewish thought on this subject was profoundly influenced by the Persian, and that the combination of the two systems resulted in a curious and complex amalgam. The scene is constantly shifting and sometimes the following series is to be found: (a) Messianic Conquest and founding of a millennial Kingdom, (b) Resurrection and Day of Yahweh, (c) Final distribution of rewards and punishments to righteous and sinners; or again: (a) The appearance of Messiah to Judgment, (b) Establishment of the Kingdom after the Resurrection, (c) A final condition of bliss or pain in the Age to Come. It is not difficult to understand the origin of this complexity. Those whose hopes were centred on a national Messiah would tend to identify the Kingdom with the Good Time or the Days of the Messiah, and these expressions might be used as synonymous for the Kingdom itself, as distinct

from the period of its realisation. On the other hand, those who looked forward to the end of the present world, might identify the Kingdom with the Age to Come. In fact, the national form of the Messianic expectation was not clearly distinguished in this period from the eschatological form. "They run into each other and blend like the overlapping edges of two clouds."<sup>1</sup>

It was the eschatological, and not the national form of the Messianic expectation, which seems to have conditioned the Baptist's thought. There is nothing in his preaching which suggests the coming of a national Messiah, nor of a Good Time for Israel in the present world. The Coming One of whom the Baptist spoke was to fill the role of Judge on the day of doom - a role which the Messiah is frequently apportioned in the apocalyptic literature.<sup>2</sup> He was to sift out the wheat from the chaff by a terrible baptism of wind and fire, and only those who submitted to John's water baptism and changed their lives could hope to pass through the fire-baptism unscathed. The appearance of the three elements

1. Moore: Judaism, ii, p.323; cf. Jackson & Lake: op.cit., i, pp.269-278.
2. E.g. Baruch, 2:21ff., Kautzsch, i, p.218; Ps.Sol. 17:21ff., Kautzsch, ii, p.146; Enoch, 60:25, Kautzsch, ii, p.270; Judith, 16:18, Kautzsch, i, p.164; Jubilees, 9:15, Kautzsch, ii, p.57. It is to be observed that very occasionally God is assigned this role, and Brandt: Die jüd.Bap., p.77, thinks that John taught that God, not the Messiah, would execute judgment. This is possible, but improbable, because the transcendent Jewish view of God would permit Him to be thought of as Judge only in very special circumstances. For other references, cf. Encyclopaedia Biblica, ii, coll. 1355-1372.

of water, wind, and fire in the Baptist's preaching may be no more than mere chance, but Eisler suggests that here are to be seen traces of a Hellenistic theory of three world catastrophes. "Since the Greeks, like the Egyptians, divided the year into three seasons, spring, summer and winter, and interpreted these seasons by a cyclic overbearing of the three elements air, fire and water, there must have been a Hellenistic theory postulating three world catastrophes, by water, wind and fire, corresponding to the rainfall of the winter, the equinotical storms of the spring, and the glow of the summer sun .... Under the influence of such ideas, the Baptist must have regarded the 'woes of the Messiah' as a catastrophic year, whose winter would induce a world flood, its spring, a catastrophic tempest, and its summer, a world conflagration."<sup>1</sup> Similarly the reference to the 'fan' and to the 'axe' of the Coming One are to be understood, Eisler thinks, as due to the influence of astrological ideas. The 'fan' is the constellation mizre, or winnowing-shovel,<sup>2</sup> and the 'axe' the constellation Orion, in which the ancients imagined they saw the image of a double-headed axe or pick-axe.<sup>3</sup> Whether the Baptist was in reality so versed in astrology, as Eisler believes, is uncertain. Both the 'fan',<sup>4</sup> and the 'axe',<sup>5</sup> appear in the Old Testament as typical instruments

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1. Eisler: op.cit., p.280.

3. Op.cit., ibid.

5. Jer.51: 20ff.

2. Job, 37:9.

4. Is. 41: 15-16; Jer.51:2.



of destruction while the fire-baptism or world conflagration was a very common idea in apocalyptic literature influenced by Persian, as distinct from Hellenistic, notions. Of the impending catastrophe, however, there can be little doubt, John's message was one of doom for the unrepentant, and Matthew undoubtedly gives the correct note in the words, 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?'<sup>1</sup> Luke, on the other hand, tries to soften down John's message by adding, 'With many such exhortations and others did John evangelise the people.'<sup>2</sup> This verse will readily be recognised as one of Luke's characteristic attempts to round off his periods. 'Evangelised', or 'preached the good news', conveys quite the wrong impression of John's preaching. For John, the present world would experience a terrible fire-baptism, and after judgment had been meted out by the Messiah, the New Age or the Kingdom of God would begin.

It is not easy to determine to what extent the eschatological as distinct from the national form of the Messianic hope was a feature of contemporary thought. To judge from the scanty allusions in Philo and Josephus, and from the Gospel references, it would seem, at any rate, that the eschatological was the less popular form. The multitude in

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1. 3:18.

2. 3:7.

general expected not a world conflagration, nor a Messiah sitting in final judgment, but a national Messiah, the Son of David, who would bring victory and prosperity to all the Jews. On the other hand, it would be rash to suppose that the people in general were unacquainted with apocalyptic speculation. It is true that 4 Ezra and Baruch which present this speculation in its purest form cannot be dated earlier than 70 A.D., but the idea is already apparent in Daniel, and in the Similitudes of Enoch, (circa 80-60 B.C.), and it is known that the former, at least, circulated freely. The written word, however, is not always a safe guide to the time of origin of the beliefs it sets forth and the Apocalypses in their final form no doubt represent a body of thought with a shorter or a longer history behind it, which was crystallised and set down in written form. E.F. Scott is surely correct in saying, "It may be concluded that in the popular tradition, as in the literature, the national and the apocalyptic elements of the Messianic hope were blended. The people would naturally apprehend the hope on its political (or national) side: but they were conscious that it had another aspect (the eschatological) which they willingly recognised as legitimate."<sup>1</sup>

In view of this, it would seem that there are no grounds

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1. The Kingdom and the Messiah, p.56.

for the assumption that the peculiar work of the Baptist lay in popularising eschatological ideas. According to this opinion, as E.F. Scott points out, eschatological speculations<sup>1</sup> were the property of a comparatively small literary group only, and were not shared by the people in general. The significance of the Baptist's ministry lay in giving these esoteric speculations a wider currency. However attractive this theory may be at first sight, there is, E.F. Scott continues,<sup>2</sup> no evidence to support it. Eschatological speculations were not confined to a small literary circle, but formed part and parcel of the deepest hopes of the masses in this period. It can scarcely be denied, of course, that such speculations were as yet in an inchoate and plastic state, and that only at a later period were they brought into a more definite and more intelligible form. Of the general currency of these ideas, however, the same writer concludes,<sup>3</sup> there can be no doubt, and there is no indication that the Baptist's view of the Kingdom and the Messiah was an esoteric one.

Schweitzer goes a step further. In his opinion the significance of the Baptist lay not so much in popularising eschatological ideas, as in giving them a completely new orientation. "The ultimate differentia of this new eschatology", he writes,<sup>4</sup> "is, that it was not called into existence

1. Op.cit., p.66, with reference to Titius: Jesu Lehre v.R.G..

2. Op.cit., ibid. 3. Ibid.

4. The Quest of the Historical Jesus, pp.367-368.

by historical events ... but solely by the appearance of two great personalities (John and Jesus), and subsides with their disappearance, without leaving among the people generally any trace. The Baptist and Jesus are not therefore borne on the current of a general eschatological movement. They themselves create eschatological facts." Perhaps this statement might be true of Jesus if his life and teaching as a whole are interpreted in a particular way, but it is doubtful whether it can be regarded as true of John in view of the very limited nature of reliable evidence. The records of the Baptist's teaching seem much too fragmentary to permit of such a far-reaching and sweeping pronouncement. In any case, it is not clear from the Gospel tradition that John's eschatological notions did differ in any way from the prevailing ideas of the time. "So far from adding new features to the ordinary picture of the last days, John aimed at presenting it in its simplest form, without any elaboration of details."<sup>1</sup>

Now if John's notion of the Kingdom and the Messiah was eschatological rather than national, and if the eschatological view was less popular with the masses than the national, the question may well be asked: Wherein lay the secret of the Baptist's popularity, of which both the Gospels and Josephus leave no one in any doubt? In view of his popularity, would

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1. E.F.Scott:op.cit., p.68.

it not be more natural to suppose that he prophesied the coming of a national Messiah, and of a Good Time for Israel under his rule? Would he not have been more likely to win the ears of the people by the proclamation of a milder and more hopeful expectation than by the frightful picture of Judgment which he appears to have drawn? In some respects this consideration is a powerful one, but it cannot be allowed greater weight than the impression conveyed by what appears to the present writer to be the correct interpretation of the Gospel records. Allowance must be made, too, for mass psychology. There can be no doubt that John's appearance, his manner of dress, and his austere mode of living, would produce a very profound impression. Coupled with this was the fact that he offered a baptism which many erroneously interpreted as securing their salvation in the coming fire-baptism. More than this, the masses could hardly fail to realise the intense sincerity with which the Baptist drove home his teaching. Perhaps the real key to the situation, however, lay in the blending of eschatological and national Messianic hopes in the Baptist's time. There were many, doubtless, who would interpret John's preaching in their own way, and who would link up his message with their inmost national hopes. It is even probable that some regarded John as the Messiah during his lifetime. Certainly this view

would be held only in extreme and isolated cases, but more common may have been the opinion that he foretold the coming of a conquering national Messiah. There is no evidence, however, that this was actually John's own viewpoint, but it is easy to see how such an error might have arisen in an environment of intermingling ideas, and, in turn, to understand the Baptist's peculiar popularity.

It is to be observed that the Baptist gives practically no description of the coming Kingdom. After the baptism by fire, and the sifting out of the wheat from the chaff, he simply states that the Messiah 'will gather his wheat into the garner'<sup>1</sup>. He no doubt implies that those who are gathered into the garner will enjoy certain blessings, but whether these are spiritually or materially conceived cannot be accurately determined. It is very remarkable how John dwells almost continually upon the other side of the picture, the hideous fate of the unrepentant, the burning of the chaff in 'unquenchable fire'. The austerity of his message cannot be missed. It is just this, however, which may explain his silence as to the conditions in the future Kingdom. John was much more concerned with the requirements essential for participation in the Kingdom, than with the Kingdom itself. As McGiffert puts it, "John was concerned not with future conditions and developments, but only with present reforma-

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1. Matt.3:12.

tion, which he felt to be the immediate and pressing need of the hour in view of the nearness of judgment."<sup>1</sup>

In his silence as to the conditions obtaining in the Kingdom, John differed sharply from the majority of the O.T. prophets. Most of these prophets are not content with predicting the coming of the Kingdom, but give in addition shorter or longer descriptions of the Kingdom itself.<sup>2</sup> This is understandable, certainly, inasmuch as the Kingdom was generally conceived of by them in the national sense, and thus would lend itself the more readily to descriptive details. But it would not be surprising if the people in general, who were familiar with eschatological notions, pictured the apocalyptic Kingdom in the same material and sensuous way as they did the national. To judge from the apocalyptic literature itself, it may well be believed that they did so, since the apocalyptic writers themselves frequently speculate on the conditions of the Kingdom. It is not clear whether the Baptist himself shared these notions. While there is no definite evidence to show that he did, it would be precarious to deduce from his silence that he did not. All that can be safely said is that for John the conditions in the Kingdom were of much less importance than the preparation for it.

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1. History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age, p.13.

2. E.g. Joel, 3:18ff; Is.65:17ff; Micah, 5:8ff.

If John said little regarding the conditions in the Kingdom he said more about its membership. The crucial point in this connection is to determine whether he regarded the Kingdom as open to all men, or as limited to the Jewish people only. Did he anticipate the universal outlook of Jesus, or did his vision not extend beyond the racial exclusiveness characteristic of Judaism in general? The words Judaism in general are appropriate, because it should not be imagined that at no time did Judaism rise above narrow and exclusive national hopes. Where it does, however, one gets the distinct impression that criticism has been loath to accord it its full due. The tendency has been to distinguish Judaism and Christianity too sharply as far as the Kingdom is concerned, and to regard Judaism as wholly exclusive and narrow, and Christianity as universal and unlimited in their respective views as to the membership of the Kingdom. While this is generally true, it does not always hold, and the exceptions are so striking that sweeping statements like the above can be accepted only with the utmost reserve. Amos, for example, has a remarkable width of view. As J.E.McFayden says, "History, reflection, and revelation have convinced him that Israel has had unique religious privileges, 3:2; nevertheless she stands under the moral laws by which all the world is bound, and which even the heathen acknowledge, 3:9,



- Amos has nothing to say of any written law specially given to Israel - and by these laws she will be condemned to destruction, if she is unfaithful, just as surely as the Philistines and the Phoenicians. Indeed, so sternly impartial is Amos that he at times seems even to challenge the prerogative of Israel ... Israel is no more to Jehovah than the swarthy peoples of Africa, 9:7."<sup>1</sup> Jonah, likewise, can envisage the love of God as embracing not only the Jews, but even the people of Nineveh, 4:2,11. Zechariah, in turn, while upholding the importance of Jerusalem, is inspired by a noble universalism. 'All the nations shall go up from year to year to worship the King', 14:16ff. Finally, Malachi rises far above the level of ordinary Judaism in these words, 'From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles.... my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of Hosts', 1:11. It is possible to multiply such passages, but these are sufficient to show that the spirit of Judaism, especially in its later form, was by no means narrow and exclusive, and it is in the light of these passages that the teaching of John the Baptist regarding the membership of the Kingdom should almost certainly be interpreted. Very significant are the words, 'And think not to say within yourselves:

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1. Introduction to the Old Testament, pp.220-221.

We have Abraham to our Father; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.<sup>1</sup> Instead of relying on their ancestry, the people of Israel must 'bring forth fruits' to show their change of life. It is not implied, of course, that Jewish descent is of no value, but it does seem to be implied, first, that Jewish descent without the necessary moral qualifications will be valueless at judgment, and second, that others, not of Jewish descent, but nevertheless evincing changed lives, would most assuredly be 'gathered into the garner'. It is open to doubt, however, whether the Baptist actually worked out clearly in his ministry the second implication which is to be extracted from his allusion to the children of Abraham. As before, John is really less concerned with the membership of the Kingdom, than with the moral worthiness essential for entry therein. It is unlikely, however, that "the thought was wholly beyond John's horizon that the Kingdom would be opened to all men, irrespective of race."<sup>2</sup> This thought, as already noted, came very near to expression in the more generous passages of Judaism, and it is very possible that the Baptist shared this view. It was a conviction, however, which, as far as can be judged, he voiced not directly and in so many words, but indirectly and by implication.

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1. Matt. 3:9 = Lk. 3:8.

2. E.F.Scott: The Kingdom and the Messiah, p.72.

Jew as he was, Israel was doubtless dear to his heart, and in certain respects it is true, he remained within the narrower limits of Judaism. For all that, the Messiah, in his opinion, would be impartial; moral not racial considerations would constitute the decisive test. The Kingdom would be shared first and foremost, no doubt, by a repentant Israel, but others who repented would not be excluded. In this generous idea John protested against current ideas of judgment and salvation,<sup>1</sup> developed the sublimer aspects of the Messianic hope, and showed that he belonged not wholly to the old order, but also in some measure to the new.

(b) As regards the ethical teaching of John the Baptist, it may be observed, to begin with, that his ministry signified a return to the spirit of Prophetism. In other words, it is to be regarded in certain of its aspects as a protest against the narrow legalism of the official religion, and as a re-affirmation of the importance of the moral law. For centuries the true spirit of prophetism had been dead, and its place had been taken by ritual and ceremonial observances embracing every aspect of life and crushing out individualism. It cannot be doubted that the emphasis on law and ritual was unwelcome to the people in general, imposing as it did upon

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1. The polemic in Rom.2:12, against the idea that God would judge the people of Israel differently from pagans on racial grounds shows how firmly rooted that idea must have been in Jewish thought in general.

them cramping restrictions and wearisome duties. They were therefore all the more ready to welcome the Baptist in whom they saw the embodiment of the old prophetic spirit, which was still dear to them. Here was a man whose emphasis lay not upon law and ritual, but upon change of heart, upon morality in its truest and plainest form.

Convinced that a return to prophetic ideals was essential, the Baptist himself led the way by adopting the prophetic garb and the prophetic manner of living. He donned the prophet's mantle of camel's hair, and the leathern girdle of Elijah,<sup>1</sup> while his food consisted of the scant nourishment which the wilderness provided. It is very possible that in all this John deliberately associated himself with the religious traditions of the Israelites. As Dibelius writes, "The religious reformers of Israel had since the time of Elijah more or less closely represented the Nomadic or Rechabite ideal, to wit, that Israel's salvation would come not from wealth and culture, but from freedom from culture, not from without, but from within, not from the world, but from God, and they had often given expression to this view in their clothing and ways of living."<sup>2</sup> This explanation of John's practice seems much superior to that which sees in it traces of Essenic or even Mandaean influence,<sup>3</sup>

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1. II.Kings, 1:8.

2. Dibelius: J.d.T., p.133; cf. Amos, 2:12; Jer. 35:1-11.

3. So Eisler: op.cit., chapter 3.

or finds in it analogies with the practices of other Jewish or non-Jewish sects. Yet, whichever ~~ex~~planation is adopted, one cannot entirely escape the feeling that John adopted an obsolete garb in order to command attention and to impress, and hence his manner of dress and living was a spectacular attempt to revive conditions which had long since been superseded.<sup>1</sup> It would be unfair, however, to go so far as to say that John's practice was deliberately artificial in the last resort. The Baptist felt that he had a message to impart which closely resembled that of Israel's prophets, and so convinced was he of this, that he may well have felt that only by adopting the prophetic garb and the ascetic life would there be no inconsistency between his life and his teaching. The austerity of the Baptist's preaching, and the intense sincerity which lay behind it, have already been observed. It may **well be**, then, that John's austere mode of living was not so much a spectacular and artificial revival as a personal protestation of the sincerity of his teaching and of the necessity for all men to adhere to it.

St. Luke gives the fullest account of the Baptist's teaching, though, at the best, it is a meagre one. In the section 3:10ff., it is impossible to determine whether the Evangelist is using a special source or simply recording his

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1. E.F.Scott: op.cit., p.78.

own impressions of what the Baptist taught. It is noteworthy, however, that in this section, in which Mark is virtually ignored, the eschatological elements are absent, and there is some affinity to the estimate of Josephus, viz., that John was simply a preacher of morals. The affinity seems too slight to the present writer to warrant the view that the Evangelist and the historian were using a common source. This would be possible only if the passage in question could be forcibly removed from its context, and if no account were taken of Luke's description of John's eschatological emphasis elsewhere. In this section, then, the Evangelist selects, whether from his source or at random, three classes of hearers to whom the Baptist gave advice. First, to the people in general, he is represented as saying, 'He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that has none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.'<sup>1</sup> By means of concrete examples John is here no doubt formulating the general rule: he who has must share with him who has not. Second, to the taxgatherers, 'Exact no more than that which is appointed unto you';<sup>2</sup> a demand for scrupulous honesty in all monetary matters. Third, to those on military service, 'Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your rations'<sup>3</sup>: an injunction to the regular troops to refrain from cruelty, unjust accusations, and dis-

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1. 3:11.

2. 3:13.

3. 3:14.

contentment. While there is no reason to doubt this account of John's teaching, it should be borne in mind that the Evangelist gives here only the barest summary of a ministry which lasted for several years, and, hence, that it is somewhat precarious to attempt to estimate the real significance of the Baptist's ethical teaching from these fragments. Yet, as Buzy says, "They are sufficient to prove that the Baptist, leaving on one side speculative developments of dogma and the brilliant fantasies of the apocalyptic writings, planted himself squarely in the domain of popular morality, and called upon his audience to repent, and to strive after the perfection of their state."<sup>1</sup> In his protest against dishonesty, selfishness, unjust accusations, and military discontent, John was no doubt attacking the most prevalent failings in human character in his day.

In the teaching of John the Baptist, as reported by Luke, it may be said, on the negative side, that there is nothing new. Every aspect of it can be paralleled in the thought of the O.T. prophets, and in this field, at least, he does not seem to have transcended them. There is, in fact, a certain bareness in his ethical teaching, occasioned partly by an undue emphasis on the gloomy and austere side of life, and partly by his failure to announce any satisfac-

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1. The Life of St. John the Baptist, Eng. Ed., p. 81.

tory principle by which the reforms he demanded might be carried out. In other words, he appears to have formulated his demands as the occasion arose, and these demands had as their basis not an ethic of forgiveness and love, but of punishment and of judgment. The practice of unselfishness, or honesty and justice is not represented so much as pleasing in God's sight and worth striving after, as the opposite qualities are denounced as the surest guarantee of the wrath of God. While feeling very acutely the artificiality of the prevailing ethics, he seems to have announced no thoroughgoing and clean-cut principle on which a reconstructive programme could be based and applied to the conditions of his day.<sup>1</sup> On the positive side, it may be said that John's renewed emphasis on the moral law, whatever form it took, cannot be regarded too highly. It showed that he was able to distinguish broadly, at least, the essentials and the non-essentials for correct living; it enabled him to think of God not as an abstraction behind the Law who only revealed himself through traditional systems, and priests and scribes, but as the living Father to whom all men must answer; it enabled him "to appear in the arid Jewish world of his time as a fresh and vital personality";<sup>2</sup> and finally, it enabled him to turn the minds of his countrymen to those deeper issues

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1. Cf. McGiffert: op.cit., p.13.

2. E.F.Scott: The Kingdom and the Messiah, p.79.



of heart and soul which were to be dealt with by Jesus.

The above estimate of John's ethical teaching is confirmed, it would seem, by certain other indications which the Evangelists provide. Although his ministry in some of its aspects is to be regarded as a protest against the legalism of the Jewish religion, it is to be observed that nowhere does John appear to have directly questioned or criticised the value of Jewish practices, much less, of the Jewish Law. He seems, in fact, to have accepted the rigorous laws regarding fasting. Thus at Mk.2: 18-20, although the disciples of John are holding a special mourning fast owing to their master's imprisonment, the context and the Lucan parallel suggest that this mourning fast was only a continuation of an ascetic practice customary during John's association with them.<sup>1</sup> If the verses which follow are in their proper context, as seems, on the whole, probable, the words of Jesus, 'No man putteth new wine into old skins',<sup>2</sup> simply mean that while Jesus sympathised with this particular fast, John's disciples were mistaken in imagining that it was possible to express the full implication and the real significance of the moral law by strict adherence to the cramping and outworn forms of Judaism. Again, the very fact

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1. Lk.5:33-39, 'The disciples of John fast frequently'; cf. Matt. 11:19, 'John came, neither eating nor drinking.'  
 2. Mk. 2:22.

that the Baptist was left unmolested by the Pharisees and the Sadducees is significant. It is true that he raised their suspicions, but satisfied that he did not make any Messianic claim, they left him in peace. Probably his adoption of Jewish customs did much to allay their doubts, and, while not in sympathy with his movement, they could not discover in his teaching any vitally dangerous inconsistency with accepted standards. Very significant, also, is the divergence between Matthew and Luke as to the hearers to whom John addressed his warning. Luke states quite emphatically that it was to the multitude in general; Matthew equally emphatically that it was to the Pharisees and Sadducees only.<sup>1</sup> There is little doubt that Luke's version is the correct one, and that Matthew's is to be explained partly by the peculiarly Jewish predilections which pervade his Gospel, and partly as a reflection of the vehement attacks of Jesus on these classes.<sup>2</sup> The Baptist's warning is much more likely to have been addressed to all who flocked to hear him in view of the enormous crowds who presented themselves for baptism. Finally, that John did not throw himself into open conflict with the official religion is further suggested by the favourable estimate of his work given

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1. Matt.3:7 = Lk.3:7.

2. The counter-argument is that Luke has a tendency to refer incidents to the multitude.

by the Pharisee Josephus. On the other hand, it would be wrong to suppose that the Baptist laid any great emphasis on the cramping and obsolete forms of Judaism. He accepted them with diffidence, possibly because they were customary, but more probably because they harmonised with the austerity of his teaching, certainly not because they possessed in themselves any great value in his opinion. Although his vision transcended them, he did not think it necessary to dispense with them completely. He could see through their artificiality and externality, he could re-emphasise the necessity of a moral code, but he had no deep-set principle to enable him to 'fill the Law full'. Yet his contribution was far from valueless. Although he still clung to certain outworn and obsolete forms, he realised that these were of secondary importance, and he directed the mainstream of his energies not to these, but to combining the sublimer aspects of the Messianic hope with moral issues, and to watering thereby the arid soil of Judaism.

In the light of this exposition of John's eschatological and ethical teaching, it may be possible to define shortly his relation to the main currents of opinion in his time, as set forth at the beginning of this chapter.

By his insistence on the approach of an apocalyptic Messiah, John must have estranged himself, first, from the

Herodians, on political grounds, and second, from the Sadducees, on religious grounds. By his protest against formalism, by his declaration that Israel would have no special privileges at judgment, and by his fiery denunciation of his hearers' sins, he must have thoroughly embittered the Pharisees, though without actually providing them with a handle against him. His declaration that he was not the Messiah, his prophetic garb, and his practice of fasting doubtless helped to mollify them, but they would not fail to observe that he had nothing to do with the Temple and Synagogue, with the Priesthood and Sacrifice. By his non-political programme, he must have alienated the Zealots, once they had thoroughly grasped his views. On the other hand, by his re-vivication of the prophetic spirit, by his insistence on a moral code, and by his proclamation of the approach of the Kingdom and the Messiah, he must have powerfully attracted the 'Ammê-ha-Âreç, refreshed their drooping spirits, and excited in their hearts the hopes and the expectations which were dearest to them, however diverse in details these hopes and expectations may have been.

John the Baptist stands out against his background as a distinct personality. He was a man, very largely, though not completely independent of his surroundings. In externals, he belonged to the old order rather than to the new: in

thought, he reached at times beyond the old order and entered into the new. While his adherence to outworn forms shows his part in the old order, his vision of a universal Kingdom bridges old and new. His ethical code scarcely transcends the old order, but his emphasis on change of heart anticipates the new. His ministry, lacking as it did, the fundamental principles of love and forgiveness, was not one which was likely to abide; yet his ministry, while it lasted, created the very deepest impression, and linked up the pre-exilic past with the present and the future. As Blakiston puts it, "It is this fact which gives John his unique importance in the religious development of his people: for in his own person he linked up the old and the new, he unified certain diverse elements in both phases, and he fittingly rounded off the progressive history of the past, bringing it to the point where it shortly culminated in the revelation to be made by Jesus."<sup>1</sup> Even the scanty nature of our sources cannot hide the fact that the ministry of John the Baptist was of far greater significance than was, and is, generally believed, and that the Voice of John was not a mere Voice in the Wilderness, but the instrument of an enlightened and independent personality. The Baptist cannot be regarded as belonging entirely to Judaism. He stood at the crossroads

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1. John the Baptist, p.182.

between Judaism and Christianity, re-emphasising the grandest thought of the Old Testament, and at the same time, anticipating, and in part, inaugurating, the distinctive outlook of the new era.

## Chapter VI.

### THE RELATIONS OF JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST.

Although the Synoptists reduce the period of relationship between Jesus and John to the very briefest contact at the moment of the baptism of Jesus, and although the Fourth Evangelist creates a *mise en scène* by indicating that the ministries of John and Jesus overlapped in order to give historical verisimilitude to the testimony of John to Jesus, yet all four Evangelists preserve very valuable evidence to enable the critic to estimate the correct ~~w~~ significance of the relations between Jesus and the Baptist. This evidence consists partly of concrete incidents, and partly of direct testimony, which suggest a considerable period of more or less close contact between the two. Opinions will differ as to the way in which this evidence should be interpreted, and as to what part of it is historical, and what redactional, but it is from this evidence, when pruned of later additions, that it will be possible to gain the clearest picture of the significance of John the Baptist.

It may be advisable at the outset to summarise for clarity's sake the statements already made regarding the chronologies of John and Jesus. These were, first, that the ministry of John the Baptist extended over a much

longer period than the Evangelists indicate, and second, that the baptism of Jesus marked the culmination of a period during which Jesus had been associated with John, before the beginning of his own ministry. The first of these points has already been demonstrated as practically certain both on textual and other grounds, and not least, by the exposition of the importance of the Baptist's ministry in the preceding chapter: the second, apart from the non-overlapping of the two ministries, still remains to be proven. Now if it should so happen that the thought of Jesus should appear to have been profoundly influenced by the thought of John, and if, at the same time, Jesus should seem to have given an unqualified eulogy of the personality of the Baptist, then it would scarcely be wrong to conclude that the contact between the two was anything but a brief one. Whether the evidence, in its original form, points in this direction may now be examined. The material is divided into three sections:

- (A) John's opinion of Jesus.
- (B) The thought of John and the thought of Jesus.
- (C) The personality of John and the thought of Jesus.

(A) The oldest and the most reliable tradition records that Jesus, immediately after his baptism, left John and withdrew into the wilderness for a period of communion with



God in prayer; that, in the interval, the Baptist was arrested and confined in some Galilean fortress; and, finally, that the arrest of the Baptist coincided with the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. It is now necessary to consider the very important material common to Matthew and Luke describing the mission of John's disciples to Jesus at some point during the latter's public ministry. According to Matthew,<sup>1</sup> John had heard in prison of the activity of Jesus, and sends two of his disciples to ask him: 'Art thou he who was to come, or ought we to expect another?' Jesus bids the messengers tell John of the miracles which he is accomplishing, and of his preaching of the Gospel, that is, the fulfilment of the Messianic predictions of Isaiah<sup>2</sup>, and concludes, 'Blessed is he who finds no cause of offence in me.' As soon as the messengers depart with the answer, Jesus begins to speak to the crowd about John. Luke<sup>3</sup> narrates the episode in much the same way, except for the unimportant variation, (v.21), that the miracles of which Jesus speaks are represented, for the sake of vividness, as taking place before the eyes of the astonished delegation. There immediately follows, as in Matthew, a speech about John.

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1. 11:2ff.

2. 29:1, 19; 30:5-6; 61:1.

3. 7:18ff. Luke is slightly longer, but the repeated question is very characteristic of the Evangelist. There is nothing to indicate that Luke is using a second source.

Although in both Gospels the episode of the delegation immediately precedes the speech of Jesus on the Baptist, it is unnecessary to suppose that in actual fact the sequence was so close. The speech of Jesus, as will be seen presently, is not a complete unity as it stands, but is composed partly of "Herrnworte" delivered on different occasions and grouped together by the Evangelists because of their common theme, and partly of later additions. The early Christian community was interested to know what opinion Jesus had of John, and this interest led to the very natural practice of the Evangelists to bring under as few headings as possible isolated and scattered references of Jesus to John. The delegation passage may therefore be considered apart from the speech which follows. In fact it is very fittingly and very characteristically rounded off by the words of Jesus, referring, surely, not to John in particular, but of quite general application, 'Blessed is he who findeth no cause of offence in me.'

The crucial point is to determine whether the delegation episode is historical or a later invention. If it is a later invention, it cannot be regarded as possessing any independent value in estimating the relations of Jesus and John. If, on the other hand, it could be seriously considered as belonging to an old tradition, then it might

yield some peculiarly valuable evidence regarding the personality and the outlook of John the Baptist.

The best critical approach will be to set forth the arguments which have been advanced against the historicity of the passage. Succinctly these are, (a) that the whole incident is conceived from the point of view, not of John, but of Jesus, to show that in Jesus Messianic prophecy was fulfilled; (b) that John's question is incompatible with his view of an apocalyptic Messiah; (c) that the episode is omitted by Mark; and (d) that the passage should be regarded as a piece of polemic against John for not recognising that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. At first sight these arguments seem impressive, but it seems doubtful whether they can bear the weight which has been put upon them.

(a) It can hardly be denied that the main interest of the Evangelist, at least, lies not in the question of John, but in the reply of Jesus. Nothing is said as to the effect of the reply of Jesus on John himself. Did he draw the conclusion intended, viz., that Jesus was the Messiah, or did he not? The Evangelist does not say. But even although the Evangelist's interest lies not in the question but in the answer, it is surely rather arbitrary to suppose that the whole incident was fabricated to show that in Jesus the

Messianic programme was fulfilled. It would be difficult to think of a more artificial way of proving this. Why introduce John at all? Could not the Evangelist have represented Jesus as making the same declaration in response to a question of one of the crowd? Why have recourse to John, who was shut up in prison, awaiting his execution? Again, there is nothing in the question of John and in the answer of Jesus which in the least way suggests redaction. The expression  $\delta \epsilon \chi \theta \mu \epsilon \nu \omicron \varsigma$  however technical in Jewish-Christian circles for the Messiah was undoubtedly used by the Baptist himself, since it appears on his lips in another passage, the authenticity of which there is no reason to doubt.<sup>1</sup> The indirectness of the answer of Jesus is very characteristic. It was his custom not to give men a direct answer to such questions, but to lead them in such a way as to find out the answer for themselves.<sup>2</sup> In all this, there is, it would seem, very strong evidence in favour of the historicity of the passage.

(b) The opinion that John's question is incompatible with his view of an apocalyptic Messiah contains a certain element of truth, but yet in its entirety it appears to be too sweeping. Its element of truth lies in the fact that it points the way to the correct interpretation of the

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1. Matt.3:11.

2. Cf. Mk.10:19, Lk.10:26.

incident. It has already been shown that John envisaged the Messiah as an apocalyptic Judge, and that the oldest tradition of the baptism contained no indication that John recognised Jesus to be the Messiah he envisaged. John's question, therefore, should, almost certainly, be taken as denoting not waning faith, but rising hope that Jesus might indeed be the Messiah. Loisy is surely correct on this when he writes, "The question which John addresses to Jesus is not a doubt after faith, but the first suspicion which awakened in his heart regarding the grand role which might belong to the preacher of Nazareth."<sup>1</sup> That such a hope, however faint, may have awakened in the Baptist's mind is not an impossible psychological process, in view of the reports he received of the preaching and the miracles of Jesus. In any case, the question is only a tentative one. Certainly it cannot be regarded as so unnatural and incompatible with John's views as to clinch the non-historicity of the incident.

(c) The Marcan omission of the passage need cause no concern. Matthew and Luke had access to special sources which Mark did not use, and the remarkable agreement between Matthew and Luke in the form of the question of John and the answer of Jesus suggests that they are here drawing

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1. Les Évangiles Synoptiques, I, p.660. For a list of interpretations of this passage, cf. Buzy: Op.cit., French Ed., pp.286-306.

upon the Q source.

(d) Finally, the idea that the whole incident is a piece of polemic against John for not recognising that Jesus was the Messiah is most unlikely. Presumably what is meant by this is that the polemic is directed against a continuing Baptist group supposed to have been rivals to Christianity. Quite apart from the fact that there is reason to believe that no such continuing group existed, it may well be asked: Would this have been a likely way to attack that hypothetical group? Would anyone desirous of showing the members of this group the error of their ways have pointed out that their founder did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah? The polemic, to be successful would have shown quite conclusively, as in the Fourth Gospel, that the Baptist did acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah, and hence, by implication, that the group was mistaken in its views. If the idea of polemic be abandoned, it seems natural to conclude that the incident is historical, "inasmuch as no later age would ascribe to John a mood of doubt so compromising to himself."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the Christian tradition, which made of John the herald of Jesus, would never have depicted him in so unfavourable a light.

The importance of the delegation passage for a correct

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1. W.Manson: The Gospel of Luke, p.78.

understanding of the relations of John and Jesus can hardly be overestimated. It shows that only in his last days did the possibility occur to John that Jesus might be the Messiah. The conversation at the baptism of Jesus, as reported by Matthew, indicating that John recognised Jesus as the Messiah, is almost certainly unhistorical. It cannot have been written by the hand which recounted the delegation incident. It is possible that John saw in Jesus a personality distinct from the others who came to his baptism, and that the activity of Jesus as reported to him in prison, confirmed his opinion that in this particular Applicant for baptism there had been and there was something unique which prompted the half-hopeful, half-doubtful question - 'Art thou he?' But that hope, so far as can be judged, never reached conviction, and the Baptist died without fully realising that the Coming One of his most cherished expectations had indeed come.

It is a far cry from this estimate of John's opinion of Jesus to the traditional estimate which regards him as conscious forerunner and witness. The Synoptists have done their best to create this impression, but they have not entirely hidden the fact that the Baptist's role was in reality different from what they say. They have minimised the really significant aspect of the Baptist's life - his powerful and independent ministry - and they have exaggerated

into a conviction a hope which John began to entertain too late in the day to be of any significance whatsoever. But in this the Fourth Evangelist is clearly the master. To judge from his Gospel alone, there could be no doubt that John did recognise Jesus as the Messiah. So anxious is the Evangelist to establish this, that he has nothing to say about John's own ministry at all. John is given to observe, 'This was he of whom I spake: He that cometh after me is preferred before me, because he was before me.'<sup>1</sup> Later he says again, 'Behold the Lamb of God who is to remove the sin of the world.'<sup>2</sup> In the testimony of John to Jesus at 3:27ff., John declares that he stands as a friend beside Jesus, the Bridegroom, and rejoices to hear the voice of the Bridegroom. These are not the actual words of the Baptist, but reflections of the Evangelist himself reminiscent of the terminology employed by Jesus at Mk. 2:19. Moreover, the section 3:31-36 is almost certainly out of place and should belong to the discourse with Nicodemus<sup>3</sup>. Every verse is reminiscent of a saying attributed to Jesus elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> In all this, it is obvious that the similarity between the speeches in which the Baptist gives his testi-

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1. Jn. 1:15.

2. Jn. 1:29, 36.

3. Cf. chapter II, p. 82.

4. 3:30 = I.Jn.1:4 = 2 Jn.12.      3:33 = I.Jn.5:10.  
      3:31 = 3:3                      3:34 = 7:16 = 8:28 = 6:68.  
      3:32 = 3:12 = I.Jn.4:6.      3:35 = 5:20 = 17:2.  
                  3:36 = 3:5 = 3:18 = 6:47.



mony and the discourses of Jesus Himself in this Gospel and elsewhere, is due to the fact that the Evangelist is recasting completely the Baptist's utterances in the after-light of the revelation of the Word, and that, too, with a very definite aim in view. The Fourth Evangelist had an axe to grind, and by integrating John in the Gospel history, and by minimising the significance of his work, he was probably attacking not a genuine continuing Baptist movement, but a contemporary Jewish disaffection. The historicity of the Fourth Gospel, as far as the Baptist is concerned, reduces itself, it would seem, to very small proportions. Non-historical is the Baptist's testimony to Jesus; non-historical is the account of the passing over of John's inner circle of disciples to Jesus. Historical is the short passage 1:19-28, (except verse 26B), describing the deputation sent by the Jews to enquire who John was; historical, too, when pruned of its later redactions, is the discussion between John and Jesus about purification at Aenon near to Salim, (3:25). Curiously enough, in the first of these passages, the Fourth Evangelist, however anxious he is elsewhere to reduce the significance of John, creates the impression that if John's activity called forth an official delegation to investigate it, that activity must have been more important and far-

reaching than might otherwise be judged! The evidence of the Fourth Evangelist does not ring quite true, but it is possible to appreciate the importance of the motive which led him to do less justice, and, at the same time, more justice to John than he deserved, less justice, in passing over in silence the Baptist's ministry, more justice, in overstressing his affinities to Jesus.

In the light of these facts, the traditional view of John's significance as forerunner and witness to the Person of Jesus seems to be discounted. Whatever else John did, he did not prepare his hearers to find the Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth. That John himself had not the faintest inkling during his ministry that Jesus was the Messiah is firmly established by the oldest tradition. The Messiah of John was a transcendent apocalyptic Being, and John's hearers had learned to expect that the approach of such a Being was at hand. Thus, when John's voice was silenced and Jesus began to preach, the people could see in Jesus no outward affinity to the promised Messiah. For many Jesus was only another prophet and, to begin with, he does not seem to have had the same measure of success and influence as John had.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is not hard to find. John's ministry had been a spectacular one. The

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1. Cf. Bernouilli: Johannes der Täufer und die Urgemeinde, p.90.

prophet from the desert with his daring baptismal rite and his fearful warnings had powerfully captured the imagination of the folk. The appearance of Jesus was, at first, an anti-climax. It was only when the crowds heard of the works which Jesus was performing that they hastened to listen to the message of this new Prophet, and were, in turn, gripped by his words, and astonished by his deeds .... Had John been released from confinement, his ministry from that point might have taken a different course. He might then have really been the witness to Jesus, which the Fourth Evangelist would dearly have believed of him. But that is speculation, not historical fact.

(B) In an estimate of the influence of the thought of John upon the thought of Jesus, it may be noted, to begin with, that Jesus, like John, announced no political programme. It would have been unnecessary to insist upon this, did not Eisler so emphatically maintain the opposite view. For Eisler, Jesus, no less than John was a political rebel, and inspired by John's example, sought to overthrow the Roman government, and to set himself up as King and Deliverer. The attempt proved futile, and it was because of this, Eisler asserts, that Jesus was condemned and crucified.<sup>1</sup> As in John's case, Eisler's estimate of the

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1. The Messiah Jesus, pp.567-571.

Messiahship of Jesus is based partly on the Slavonic Fragments and late Apocryphal writings, partly upon arbitrary handling of the Gospel texts, and partly upon speculations of his own which are presented with the utmost confidence as indisputable historical facts. Now it does not lie within the scope of this work to refute in detail Eisler's opinions regarding Jesus;<sup>1</sup> a few remarks, however, will not be out of place. It has already been shown that no weight can be attached to the Slavonic Fragments on which Eisler builds his imposing theories, and examples have been given of his uncritical methods in dealing with the Gospel texts. Accordingly, it is necessary to consider here only what, on Eisler's own admission, is the keystone of his theory regarding the Messiahship of Jesus.

Jesus, like John the Baptist, Eisler states, belonged to the wayfaring Rechabite class. Disillusioned and homeless, these itinerant craftsmen, descended from Jared, marked with a common sign (†) with their ranks composed of people who had come down in the world, were bitterly opposed to the Roman government, and eagerly awaited the leadership of a true scion of David to re-establish the glories of the house of Israel. "Is it surprising then", Eisler writes,

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1. In addition to the literature cited on p.27, see also Draguet: Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique, xvi, 1930, pp.833-879; Braun: Revue Biblique, xl, 1931, pp.345-363; Goguel: op.cit., appendix, pp.299ff.

"that in one of these sons of David, the blood of the old adventurer and freebooter, victorious in battle and risen to be King of Israel, should have stirred up again and driven this poet and dreamer (Jesus) to step forth from the dark life in which he lived to proclaim in this time of the deepest humiliation of his people a renewal of the ancient glory through a miracle of God immediately impending?"<sup>1</sup> Thus, for Eisler, the consciousness of Jesus of his Messiahship is to be explained not by an experience at his baptism, but entirely by political and sociological considerations.

For two important reasons this theory seems to be unacceptable. First, there is no clear evidence that Jesus ever proclaimed himself to be the Son of David, as the theory pre-supposes. That this was the belief not of Jesus himself but of the disciples and the early Christian community is the impression which a careful perusal of the sources affords. At Mk. 12:35 Jesus says, 'How do the scribes say that the Christ is a Son of David?' The implication seems to be that the scribes were wrong, and that, in Mark's opinion, Jesus, while being the Messiah, did not claim to be the Son of David. If it be felt, however, that the title is too deeply rooted in Christian tradition to

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1. Eisler: op.cit., pp.326-327.

have arisen unless it had actually been used by Jesus himself, it might be possible to explain the Marcan passage as indicating that although Jesus did in fact, call himself Son of David, he was not Son of David in the popular sense, but Son of David in the light of the Servant passages in Isaiah.<sup>1</sup> But this is improbable. The identification of Jesus with the Son of David belongs to the later strata of the Gospels and the earlier chapters of Acts, and neither at Mk. 10:47 nor at 11:10, does Jesus appear to have clearly accepted the identification made by Bartimaeus and the crowd. There seems to be, then, no real proof that Jesus himself laid claim to Davidic, i.e. royal descent.<sup>2</sup> Second, Eisler presents no convincing argument that Jesus any more than John belonged to the Rechabite class. It has already been indicated that these people as a distinct class were probably no longer in existence in the first century A.D.,<sup>3</sup> and even if they were, what evidence is there that Jesus was one of them? The fact that the genealogy of Jesus in Lk. 3:37 is traced back to Jared, the carpenter, whom Eisler assumes to be the ancestor of the Rechabites, proves nothing, because, as Jack puts it, "there must have been thousands of his des-

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1. Cf. Rawlinson: Gospel of Mark, pp.174, 256; T.W.Manson: The Teaching of Jesus, p.266, note 2.

2. Cf. Jackson and Lake: op.cit., I, 1, pp.364-366.

3. Chapter IV, p.224-225.

cendants in the time of Jesus who were not nomads, but were dwelling like others in towns and villages and engaged in established trades."<sup>1</sup> Equally inconclusive is his attempted identification of the tribal sign of the Rechabites, (which, he supposes, they assumed on the basis of Exek.9:4), with the cross which Jesus bade his followers take.<sup>2</sup> There is no evidence that Jesus told his followers to mark themselves with a cross. Still less convincing is the line of connection which he attempts to draw between the Rechabites and Jesus on the ground of their common practice of divination and healing.<sup>3</sup> No one, unless, like Eisler, he had a pre-conceived theory to prove, would ever imagine that Jesus was a Rechabite because he went about healing. If then, on his own admission, Eisler can explain his view of the Messiahship of Jesus only on the grounds that Jesus proclaimed himself to be the Son of David, and belonged to the dispossessed sons of Israel, and if his arguments in support of these contentions are void of proof, then he cannot expect anyone to be enthusiastic over his arbitrary alterations and interpretations of the Gospel

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1. The Historic Christ, p.256.

2. σημεῖον (LXX) in Exek.9:4 probably means - a totemic sign or identity mark to be placed on the forehead, not necessarily like a cross, but resembling the signs commonly placed on stonework.

3. The Messiah Jesus, pp.328-329.

texts in support of his theory. These are not of interest here. Suffice it to say that the indisputable record of these texts goes to show that the thought and the teaching of Jesus were essentially non-political. If the interpretation already given of the Baptist's ministry is correct, Jesus certainly did not receive from John, as Eisler imagines, any incentive to attempt revolutionary methods. Indeed, the non-political attitude of Jesus, which appears on practically every page of the Gospels, may perhaps have been intensified by the deep impression which he gained from the non-political teaching of the Baptist as contrasted with the fiery political propaganda of the Zealots. Certainly John's outlook chimed in admirably with Jesus' own views, and like John, Jesus strove, whenever necessary, to discredit the idea that he was in any way a political Messiah.<sup>1</sup>

Important as these considerations are, it is possible, perhaps, to trace a much more direct line of connection between the thought of John and the thought of Jesus. Not only did Jesus announce a non-political Messiahship, but the Kingdom of which he spoke was for him, as for John, not in itself an ethical or moral value, but an eschatological Kingdom, in which ethical, moral and spiritual

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1. Cf. Jn. 6:15.



values would operate. The first words of Jesus' own ministry, as reported by Matthew, are an echo of John's, 'Repent ye for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'<sup>1</sup> It is very significant that Mark adds, 'Believe in the Gospel'. It should be realised, of course, that here the Evangelists are giving only the barest summary of our Lord's primary message, but in view of the fact that the Marcan summary sets forth so admirably the essence of his teaching, it is hard to believe that Mark is not primitive. It can scarcely be due to the desire of the Evangelist to add something new to the message of Jesus as compared with John's, or in other words, to ante-date the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> It is not easy to agree with those who on the strength of Matthew's text regard the initial stages of the ministry of Jesus as identical with that of John. Even although it be admitted that the Marcan addition is not primitive, and that the word 'Gospel' is used in its Pauline sense denoting 'salvation by Christ', surely it is arbitrary to take such a terse summary as is given here as indicating the whole content of the thought of Jesus at the start of his ministry. There is, however, no compelling necessity to understand the word 'Gospel' in this way. At first, 'Gospel' meant simply 'good tidings' and only later was it

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1. Mk. 1:15 = Matt. 4:7.

2. So Goguel: op.cit., pp.243-245.

specialised to denote 'the essentials of Christian truth', or 'salvation by Christ'. Jesus, therefore, may well have used an Aramaic word meaning 'good tidings' which was rendered by the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον. Only by rather strained interpretations can the expression be regarded in Mark's Gospel wherever it appears as a later addition and a vox technica<sup>1</sup>. Quite apart from the significance of the word εὐαγγέλιον it is not easy to believe that Jesus in his public ministry, which lasted not more than a little over two years at the longest, radically altered or developed in this period the essential content of his thought to cover ideas about the love and providence of God which had hitherto been unfamiliar to him. Jesus did not begin his ministry till he was certain of the exact nature which his teaching about God should take. For these reasons, therefore, it would seem that from the very first the message of Jesus contained certain original and distinctive elements, and was not, even at the outset, a direct continuation of the Baptist's teaching in all its aspects. This consideration, however, must not obscure the fact that in certain of its aspects it was a direct continuation of the Baptist's thought, and it is important to realise, to begin with, that the eschatological view of the Kingdom formed one of these aspects.

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1. Cf. Harnack: The Constitution and Law of the Church, pp. 332ff.

That Jesus identified the Kingdom with the Age to Come is very clear in the story of the rich young ruler who asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life.<sup>1</sup> Jesus bade him sell his possessions and give to the poor, but this, the ruler was not prepared to do, because he was very rich. Then Jesus said, 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God.' The Kingdom of God is here regarded as the sphere in which eternal life exists, and as every good Jewish thinker looked upon the Age to Come as this particular sphere, one can hardly escape the conclusion that Jesus is identifying the Kingdom with the Age to Come.<sup>2</sup> The sequel makes this interpretation all the more likely inasmuch as Jesus contrasts the rewards of true discipleship 'in this time', i.e. here and now, with those 'in the world to come', i.e. in the Age to Come, or in the Kingdom. The eschatological view of the Kingdom is also apparent in the injunction, 'And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than having two eyes to be cast into hell-fire'<sup>3</sup>, in the warning, 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven'<sup>4</sup>, in the further warning, 'And I say unto you that many shall come from the

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1. Mk.10:17ff. = Lk.18:18ff.

2. Cf. Lake and Cadbury: op.cit., I, i, p.281.

3. Mk. 9:43.

4. Matt. 7:21.

east and west and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of heaven but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness',<sup>1</sup> and in the description of judgment, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'<sup>2</sup> More difficult are certain other passages, but there is nothing in any of them which definitely clashes with the usual eschatological standpoint. Prominent among these are (a) Mk.4:11; Jesus says to his disciples, 'Unto you is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God.' It is true that here the Kingdom seems to denote an ethical value, but the saying can scarcely be primitive. The word 'mystery' appears nowhere else in the Gospels, and is used as a technical term in the Paulines and the Apocalypse. Verses 10-12 have every appearance of being a patchwork addition, interrupting the exposition of the parable of the Sower (2b-9), and the explanation of it, (13-20). Either it may be supposed with Wellhausen<sup>3</sup> that verses 10-12 are an interpolation, or better, that here "the Evangelist himself has combined a theory of the 'mysterious' character of parables, which came to him from current Church tradition, with a context to which it was originally foreign."<sup>4</sup> (b) Mk.4:26-29; Jesus says,

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1. Matt.8:11 = Lk.13:29.

2. Matt.25:34ff.

3. Das Evangelium Marci, pp.32-33.

4. Rawlinson: op.cit., p.57; cf. Dodd: The Parables of the Kingdom, p.15.

'The Kingdom of God is as if a man throws seed on the earth. He sleeps and rises night and day and the seed sprouts up and grows, he knows not how. The earth brings forth of herself, first, the blade, then, the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. When the grain is ripe, he immediately sends the reapers, for the harvest is ready.'

Commenting on this parable, Bultmann writes, "Such a parable must not be interpreted in the light of modern conceptions of 'nature' and 'evolution'". If we need proof that we must lay aside our modern viewpoint in order to understand such a saying in the sense of primitive Christianity, let us consider a very similar parable of the early Christian tradition. 'O you fools, consider a plant, a grape-vine, for example. First, it sheds the old leaves, then the young shoots sprout, then leaves, then flowers, then the green grapes; finally, the ripe grapes appear. You see how quickly the fruit is ripe. Even so quickly and suddenly will God's judgment come, as the Scripture testifies: He will come quickly and will not tarry: suddenly the Lord will come to his temple, the Holy One for whom you wait. (1 Clement 23:4,5)."<sup>1</sup> The point of the parable of Jesus, then, is that just as the harvest comes upon men almost unawares, so with equal

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1. Jesus and the Word, pp.36-37.

suddenness shall the eschatological Kingdom appear.

- (c) Mk.10:14; Jesus says, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me; do not forbid them; for of such is the Kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom as a little child, shall not enter therein.' In this saying the Kingdom itself is not identified with the implicit faith of children: rather, men must accept with implicit faith the teaching of Jesus regarding the Kingdom. The Kingdom will be composed of those who so accept his teaching. (d) Mk.12:34; 'And when Jesus saw that the scribe answered discreetly, he said unto him: Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God.' The discreetness of the scribe's answer showed that he was not far from possessing the qualifications necessary for participation in the Age to Come. Once more, there appears to be no identification of the Kingdom itself with an ethical value. (e) Matt.5:3; Jesus says, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.' By this, Jesus probably meant that, even now, those who possess a proper humility of spirit, are showing a quality which would certainly be operative in the Age to Come. (f) Matt.6:33; Jesus says, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' This saying, in particular, might suggest

that the Kingdom is a moral value, but this need not be the case. What Jesus meant, perhaps, was that men must set their minds first and foremost on the coming of the Kingdom, and in view of its approach, they must concentrate on the righteousness essential for entry therein.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus, then, like John, seems to have announced the approach of an eschatological Kingdom, or in other words, a Consummation, in which God would reign all in all. But the affinity between the two teachers did not stop there. If John was silent as to the conditions existing in the Kingdom, Jesus, in turn, maintained a similar reserve. He painted no elaborate pictures of the kingdom nor did he encourage speculation on the point. The nature of the Kingdom was quite beyond human power to grasp, and the descriptions of the Kingdom in the Apocalyptic books finds no place in the teaching of Jesus. That the conditions in the Kingdom defied the imagination of man is implied in the saying: 'For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither

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1. At Matt.16:13ff., the Kingdom is identified with the Church. The identification does not seem to be a genuine saying of Jesus, but reflects the point of view of the primitive Church. The same criticism applies, perhaps, to the Parables of the Tares and the Dragnet in Chapter 13.

As this work is concerned principally with John the Baptist, it is not in place here to enlarge on the various interpretations which have been given to all these sayings and parables of Jesus. The present writer simply states his own interpretation, as he has reached it, after due consideration of different shades of opinion.

marry nor are given in marriage but are as the angels which are in heaven.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, Jesus speaks of eating and drinking in the Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, however, Jesus pictured the Kingdom as being ushered in by fearful convulsions of nature, as marking the start of a New Age of prosperity, and, above all, as signalling the renovation of human life. Whether this picture is to be understood symbolically, whether Jesus drew it in the language of contemporary thought, because he lived and moved in the atmosphere of such ideas, whether the framework in which it is set is no longer valid, each must, in the last resort, decide for himself. It is easy to overstress the apocalyptic element in the teaching of Jesus, but it is perhaps even more tempting to efface it quite unduly, because apocalyptic ideas belong to a world of thought different from our own. Perhaps the balance may be held by observing that, while the teaching of Jesus was placed within an apocalyptic framework, which cannot be, and dare not be, in all justice disregarded, the apocalyptic elements constituted only the framework, and not the living picture, the true genius of Christianity. That lay elsewhere. For the present problem, however, it is important to observe that the teaching of Jesus regarding the coming

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1.Mk.12:25.

2.Mk.14:25 = Matt.26:29; Lk.22:18.



of the Kingdom seems to have been not greatly different from John's, and in the rejection of apocalyptic speculation as to the exact conditions of the New Age there is a very remarkable similarity.

At this point reference may be made to the totally different estimate of certain modern writers, of whom Otto may be taken as an example. According to Otto, the Kingdom in the thought of Jesus is to be regarded not as the Consummation in which God will reign all in all, but as "dynamis, the inbreaking miraculous power of the transcendent, the inbreaking power of God into salvation. As such, it is operative in the exorcist dynamis of its messenger, and equally in the exousia and charis of his preaching. He himself is charisma."<sup>1</sup> Thus, whereas John stood strictly in the line of later Jewish apocalyptic, the thought of Jesus is to be traced back to the ancient Asura religion in which Kingdom signifies "power and might coercive ruling power ... which conquers enemies and oppositions, which is capable of mighty working, and which, especially as divine power can regulate fashion and create."<sup>2</sup> This interpretation of the teaching of Jesus is an ingenious one, particularly so, in view of the many references to the

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1. Op.cit., pp.334, 375.

2. Op.cit., p.25.

success of Jesus in casting out demons, and in view of the modern tendency to seek a rational explanation of the "miracles". It is true that exorcism as a feature of Jesus' activity has, in the past, not been sufficiently stressed, but, on the other hand, it would seem that Otto tends to overstress it and to attribute undue importance to what was a not unfamiliar practice in the times of Jesus, and a sufficiently well attested phenomenon in the annals of psychological healing. Without attempting a detailed criticism of Otto's thesis, the present writer feels that while it is possible to regard Jesus as an itinerant charismatic preacher, and the Kingdom as an inbreaking dynamis, this interpretation does not improve in any way upon that already adopted. On religious-historical lines it is quite legitimate to regard Jesus, just like other wonder-workers of that era, though, perhaps, in a unique sense, as a wandering exorcist, but it is not clear whether such an answer will satisfy the demands of faith. Accordingly, as there are no difficulties in the way of regarding Jesus' teaching of the Kingdom as being in line with John's, it seems preferable to take the view that for Jesus the Kingdom was the grand Consummation or the Reign of God, which faith awaits, the grand Consumma-

tion of the purposes of God, which, however long delayed, shall not be finally frustrated.

Now if the teaching of Jesus regarding the coming of the Kingdom was not greatly different from that of John, even more remarkable was the agreement on the membership of the Kingdom. Implicit in the thought of John, if not explicit in his teaching, was the belief that the Kingdom would be open to all men irrespective of race. There can be no doubt that Jesus himself held this view. The clearest expression of it appears in the saying, 'There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and yourselves cast out. From east and west, from north and south, men will come and will sit down to eat in the Kingdom of God.'<sup>1</sup> Bultmann, who rejects the idea that the Kingdom in the thought of Jesus was a universal Kingdom, holds that the words just quoted "merely assert that the chosen people and its heroes held the central place in the Kingdom."<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, he writes, "Jesus took for granted as did his contemporaries, that the Kingdom was to come for the benefit of the Jewish people."<sup>3</sup> It is difficult, however, to

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1. Lk.13:28-29 = Matt.8:11-12.

2. Jesus and the Word, p.45.

3. Op.cit., p.43.

agree with these statements. It is true that a certain colouring is given to them by the words put on the lips of Jesus in Matt. 19:28, 'Verily I say unto you that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, you shall also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' Although this saying belongs to Q, it is doubtful whether such a promise goes back to Jesus. In the Marcan parallel<sup>1</sup> no reference is made to the promise, and at 19:29 Matthew is clearly drawing upon Mark for the general promise of reward for discipleship. But whereas in Mark the characteristic Jewish distinction between reward in kind in this world and reward in eternal life in the Age to Come is duly kept, this distinction is dropped in Matthew, and Jesus is represented as promising reward in kind in the regeneration, or the Age to Come. It is scarcely likely therefore that the promise of thrones of judgment to the Twelve was made by Jesus himself; more probably it reflects the hope of the primitive community in which the Twelve were first chosen. Pertinent also is the Jewish emphasis at Matt. 10:5,6, where Jesus bids his disciples, 'Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the

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1. 10:28ff.

Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' In the Lucan parallel<sup>1</sup> these restrictive instructions are omitted but in Luke's case the omission could be explained by the fact that his Gospel was intended for Gentile readers. If this is so, Matthew may be drawing upon Q for this saying, and the words may be primitive, and not due to the Jewish colouring of Matthew's Gospel. The restrictive element appears also in Matt. 15:24 in the story of the Syrophenician woman and in Matt. 10:33 in the saying, 'But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next. I tell you, you shall not have gone through the cities of Israel till the Son of Man comes.' But it seems quite arbitrary to deduce from any of these passages that Jesus was limiting the membership of the Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> The prohibition of preaching to the Gentiles was quite in conformity with the historical situation. Jesus felt that his first duty was for his own people. The time was short and he could succeed only by concentration of effort. But he did not imply that the Kingdom was for the Jewish people only, nor even that the Jews by virtue of their descent would hold privileged positions in the Kingdom. For Jesus, as for

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1. 9:1-6.

2. The saying in Lk. 12:32, 'Fear not little flock for it is your Father's pleasure to give you the Kingdom', should not be interpreted in a restrictive sense, but in the light of Lk. 6:20, 'Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of heaven.'

John, the Kingdom would be a universal Kingdom and if John had failed to make this perfectly clear, Jesus was nevertheless in thorough sympathy with the Baptist's efforts to do so, and he himself made explicit the universalism latent in the Baptist's teaching.

Of paramount significance is the stress which both Jesus and John laid upon the necessity of immediate repentance in view of the coming of the Kingdom. This demand is integral to the whole of the teaching of Jesus, and finds very clear expression in Lk.13:1, 'At that time some people came to inform him about the Galilaeans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. But Jesus replied: Do you think that these Galilaeans are worse sinners than the rest of the Galilaeans because they suffered this? No, I tell you. If you do not repent you will all perish, in the same way.' This warning echoes the initial words of his ministry, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand', and the warning is repeated again and again with the most unmistakable earnestness throughout the whole course of his teaching. Thus, in Lk.6:46ff., Jesus says, 'Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say? Every one, who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I shall

show you what he is like. He is like a man who built a house, who dug deep, and made its foundation upon a rock. When the flood came the river hurled itself against that house, but could not shake it because of its firm structure. But he who hears my words and does them not is like a man who built a house upon earth without foundation. The river hurled itself upon it, and at once the house collapsed, and great was the ruin of that house.' Again, in Matt.7:14, 'Narrow is the gate and strait the way that leads to life, and few there be who find it', and to the woman who cried out to Jesus, 'Happy is the womb which bore you and the breast which gave you suck', Jesus replies, 'Rather, happy are they who hear the word of God and keep it.'<sup>1</sup> A similar thought is expressed in Mk. 3:35, 'Whosoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother', and the demand for instant decision seems to be the real point of the parable of the Great Supper. In the light of these passages, it is impossible to minimise the close connection in the thought of Jesus between repentance and the Kingdom. The Kingdom is like a pearl of great price<sup>2</sup> or like treasure hidden in a field<sup>3</sup>, for which all else must be renounced, ~~and~~ repentance must manifest itself in instant action. Indeed, it

1. Lk.11:27-28.

2. Matt.13:45-46.

3. Matt.13:44.

is difficult not to think that Jesus is employing the imagery, which he had heard the Baptist employ, in these words in the Sermon on the Mount, 'Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.'<sup>1</sup> Compare John's words, 'Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire', and 'Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance.'<sup>2</sup> It may be that Jesus employs more of the imagery of John than is realised.<sup>3</sup> Matt.23:33 looks very like an echo of John's, 'Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?' - while it is just possible that certain of the Beatitudes, and possibly parts of the Lord's prayer may have been suggested by his teaching. But this is uncertain. What does appear to be certain, however, is that Jesus had been much impressed by the close collocation in John's thought of the Kingdom and the necessity of immediate repentance since this very collocation is fundamental to the teaching of Jesus himself.

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1. Matt.7:17,19,20.

2. Matt.3:10,8.

3. Cf. B.Weiss: Das Matthäusevangelium, p.105.



Finally, it might be argued with some plausibility that the title Son of Man which Jesus applied to himself was suggested by its use by John in referring to the Coming One. Unfortunately, much obscurity surrounds this title and attempts have been made to deny its use by Jesus both on linguistic grounds and as incompatible with the facts of his life. It is unnecessary to discuss these arguments in detail here. It may be said, however, that the title seems too deeply rooted in the Gospel tradition to be anything but primitive.<sup>1</sup> As E.F. Scott puts it, "The evidence seems to prove unmistakably that not only was it used by Jesus, but that it impressed itself on the memory of his disciples as one of his characteristic terms."<sup>2</sup> What is of more interest, however, is the meaning of the term as employed by Jesus. It is suggested that the expression "is the final term in a series of conceptions, all of which are found in the Old Testament. These are: the Remnant (Isaiah), the Servant of Jehovah (II Isaiah), the 'I' of the Psalms, and the Son of Man (Daniel) .... The Son of Man is, like the Servant of Jehovah, an ideal figure and stands for the manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth in a people

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1. It occurs 69 times in the Synoptics, 12 times in the Fourth Gospel.

2. The Kingdom and the Messiah, p.194.

wholly devoted to their heavenly King."<sup>1</sup> Whether this ingenious interpretation can be accepted will depend to a large extent on the view taken as to the teaching of Jesus regarding the Kingdom. But quite apart from this, it is not improbable that the older explanation is correct, viz., that the expression is an individual one, and is connected in the thought of Jesus with the 'Suffering Servant' of Isaiah and with the apocalyptic notion of the Son of Man as Judge, and the Instrument through which the Kingdom would be inaugurated. In Otto's words, "This phrase bore such emphasis in circles familiar with the Book of Enoch, that when mention was made of 'the man', with associations of the judgment ... the words 'Son of Man' had the force of a title; and when an eschatological preacher spoke of the coming of the Son of Man and of his judgment, it was known whom he meant, viz., the king in the coming world."<sup>2</sup> When it is recalled that the Baptist himself was thoroughly steeped in the apocalyptic literature, and when it is borne in mind that the Coming One for him was essentially Judge, it would scarcely be too much to assume that John may have applied the title Son of Man to the Messiah he envisaged. It is true that

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1. T.W.Manson: The Teaching of Jesus, p.227.

2. Otto: The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man, p.226. Otto, however, develops this idea in an ingenious way of his own. For a criticism of Otto's theory and T.W. Manson's view, cf. V.Taylor: Jesus and His Sacrifice, pp.21-28.

this title does not occur in the fragmentary records of his teaching, but support is given to the idea by the fact that Jesus never used the title of himself before his unequivocal avowal of his Messiahship at Caesarea Philippi.<sup>1</sup> Up to this point Jesus was apparently unwilling to state clearly that he was Messiah. Hence his avoidance of a title which presumably his predecessor had familiarised with its Messianic connotations.

Now the remarkable affinity between the thought of Jesus and the thought of John, which has been traced up to this point, suggests, perhaps, two things; first, that Jesus had moved in John's circle for a very considerable period before the beginning of his own ministry. During this period Jesus, without actually becoming a disciple of John in the full sense of the word, was profoundly impressed by the thought and the teaching of the Baptist. It was in this same period, however, that Jesus seems to have felt that the teaching of John was in certain of its aspects inadequate. His association with John enabled him to estimate very precisely wherein exactly the Baptist's strength and weakness lay. Thus it was that when Jesus began his own ministry he re-

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1. In Mk.2:10, 2:28, Son of Man is almost certainly a mistranslation for 'man'. For a discussion of this subject, cf. T.W.Manson: op.cit., pp.211-236; Jackson & Lake: op.cit., I, i, pp.378ff.

emphasised on the one hand those aspects of his predecessor's thought which chimed in completely with his own, while, on the other hand, he either supplemented or discarded those aspects which seemed to him to be either wanting in fulness or wholly unnecessary. It should be realised, however, - and this consideration is of the utmost importance - that Jesus' estimate of the Baptist's strength and weakness was completed before the opening of his own ministry. The ministry of Jesus was distinctive and new from the very outset, and it should not be imagined that it was a direct continuation of John's in all its aspects. Such an assumption would not only be untrue to the Gospel records, but would do injustice to the unique personality of Jesus. However much Jesus was in sympathy with the Baptist's thought, he struck from the first a different note, which fundamentally distinguished his teaching from that of his predecessor. The second point suggested is, that although the Baptist did not prepare his hearers to find the Messiah in Jesus, he nevertheless did prepare his hearers to a considerable extent for certain elements in the teaching of Jesus. It is not easy, however, to agree with Bernouilli that Christianity would be more easily conceived without Jesus than without John the Baptist<sup>1</sup>, yet it is true that a

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1. Johannes der Täufer, p.104.

study of John's teaching makes more intelligible the eschatological elements in the Gospel of Jesus. John had emphasised with peculiar intensity the approach of the Age to Come; he had insisted upon personal change of life as essential for participation in this New Age; he had, moreover, implied that the Kingdom would not be limited, but universal in its scope, and had thus anticipated the view which Jesus developed to its fullest extent. In all these ways John had prepared his audience for the message of Jesus. As Goguel puts it, "John had formulated very acutely the religious problem: How will man stand on the day of Judgment? Jesus himself and the first Christian missionaries posed the problem in the same way."<sup>1</sup> But Jesus had a fuller and deeper answer to give to this problem than John, and it must now be asked wherein the distinctiveness of the teaching of Jesus lay. For by attempting an answer to this question, it may be possible to throw further light upon the relations of John the Baptist and Jesus.

It was stated above that Jesus supplemented certain aspects of John's teaching where they were lacking in fulness. Thus, to begin with, while agreeing with John that the Kingdom lay in the future, Jesus felt that his own work was so peculiarly bound up with the Kingdom that

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1. Jean-Baptiste, p.295.

he could picture it almost as already beginning. Already Satan is overthrown, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven'<sup>1</sup>, 'If I by the finger of God drive out demons, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you.'<sup>2</sup> Once more, the publicans and harlots go into the Kingdom before the self-righteous<sup>3</sup>, and men do not understand that the last hour has come.<sup>4</sup> Yet in none of these sayings does Jesus clearly imply that the breaking in of the Kingdom in its strict and original sense as the Reign of God had already taken place. And it is just here, perhaps, that the latest phase of interpretation of the teaching of Jesus regarding the Kingdom might lay itself open to criticism. Otto, for instance, puts great stress upon the sayings just quoted, and finds in them sufficient evidence to support his theory that for Jesus the Kingdom was a present reality, an "inbreaking dynamis".<sup>5</sup> T.W. Manson thinks that whereas "the Kingdom is where God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven",<sup>6</sup> the Kingdom on earth may be also defined as "a community whose faith envisages God as their King in the sense that he and he alone is their protector, guide, and legislator: and whose rule of life is summed up in complete loyalty, trust,

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1. Lk.10:18; cf. Mk.3:27.

2. Lk. 11:20.

3. Matt.21:31.

4. Mk.13:28, Lk.12:54-56.

5. The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man, pp.97-112.

6. The Teaching of Jesus, p.211.

and obedience to God their King."<sup>1</sup> Both these conceptions, he holds, were integral to the thought of Jesus. Otto's opinion is based upon a psychological interpretation of the teaching of Jesus which, as already stated, does not seem to the present writer to be wholly acceptable: T.W.Manson's opinion depends mainly upon what is perhaps a rather hard and fast division of the teaching of Jesus regarding the Kingdom into two distinct phases, (a) the sowing of the word of the Kingdom, and (b) the entering into the Kingdom, the point of division taking place precisely at the moment of Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi. From that time the Kingdom is a present reality, and is identical with those who follow Christ all the way, i.e. the Remnant.<sup>2</sup> Now although this interpretation is possible, it seems doubtful whether the evidence can support the weight of the argument imposed upon it. It is not perfectly clear that a definite change in Jesus' teaching regarding the Kingdom took place after Caesarea Philippi. If there be a change, it would seem that all Jesus implies is that he felt more intensely than before how closely his own work was bound up with the bringing in of the future Kingdom, and hence the pressing necessity for men to accept his Word wholeheartedly.

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1. Op.cit., p.195.

2. Op.cit., chapters V and VII.

For if men would only repent, God would do the rest. Nor is it certain that a rigid distinction can always be drawn between the terms 'Kingdom', 'the Day', 'Parousia of the Son of Man', 'Coming of the Son of Man' in such a way as to detach the first from the others and to treat it as a present reality. These expressions often appear to be interchangeable and inextricably linked together, despite all that has been written to the contrary. What does seem to be clear, however, is that in the thought of Jesus influences were already at work which would finally overthrow the Kingdom of Satan, and ensure the triumph of the Kingdom of God. But, as yet, strictly speaking, the fulness of the Reign of God lay in the future. Nor does there seem to be any genuine tradition that Jesus himself identified the Kingdom itself with a community of people in this world.<sup>1</sup> Certainly the community of those who accepted his Word would be members of the Kingdom, and their part is to persuade others to repent in preparation for God's Reign. But between the Kingdom itself and its members, there is a clear distinction, which has not always been maintained. The Kingdom itself

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1. Even the examples cited of this identification being integral to Jewish thought in general are late or inconclusive. Cf. Oesterley: The Gospel Parables, pp.20-21; T.W.Manson: op.cit., pp.130-141.



is the Reign of God, its members, those who after endurance and conflict with the forces of Evil both in this life and very probably in the next, will finally come under the Reign of God, when God is all in all. It is of paramount importance for men to begin the conflict at once, to decide for the good, to grasp the Truth, and so to declare themselves here and now for membership in the future Kingdom of God, whose Truth Jesus reveals. This seems to be all that Jesus teaches in these sayings. Nothing more seems to be intended than a very vivid dramatisation of an event, the real glory of which lay in the future. This is made clear in Lk.17:20ff, 'Now the Pharisees demanded when the Kingdom of God should come, and Jesus said: The Kingdom does not come by observation; nor shall men say, Look! here it is!, nor, Look! there it is! for the Kingdom (even while you are arguing about it), is in your midst!'<sup>1</sup> In other words, certainly of the future Reign of God has already broken in upon the world in the Person and the Teaching of Jesus. The Word of Jesus is the guarantee of the Kingdom, and this fact can be grasped only by those who accept the Word of Jesus

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1. ἐντὸς ὑμῶν . A crux interpretum. Two translations are possible, 'within you', or 'among you', and both are capable of different shades of interpretation, according to the view adopted regarding Jesus' teaching of the Kingdom elsewhere. The present writer's own interpretation is indicated in the text. For other views, see T.W.Manson, op.cit., p.125, note 1; C.H.Dodd: op.cit., p.84, note 1.

as Truth. Indeed, in this saying, it seems to be the vitally important connection between the Reign of God and the Word of its divine Messenger which is underlined. The Word of Truth is already come to the world and eternally reveals the certainty of God's Reign, and only by grasping the truth of the Word of Jesus can men perceive their destiny and decide for sharing in the Kingdom. In this restricted sense, it would seem, it is possible to speak of "realised eschatology". Men must live with the Kingdom in their thoughts, 'Take ye heed; watch and pray, for you know not what the time is.'<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Jesus seems to have expected that this world would form part of the sphere of the realisation of the Kingdom, and he thereby gave a new orientation to the idea of the Age to Come, which hitherto seems to have implied the annihilation of the present world and the beginning of a new. Apparently, too, Jesus expected the dénouement before the end of that generation, 'Verily I say unto you that this generation shall not pass away before all these things be accomplished.'<sup>2</sup> This may best be explained, as Rawlinson puts it, "by the supposition that the psychology of his human mind was akin to that of the prophets",<sup>3</sup> but the vivid dramatisation of the Kingdom appears to suggest very strongly that during

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1. Mk.13:33; Matt.24:42, 25:13; Lk.12:40, 21:34.

2. Mk.13:30; cf. Mk.9:1.

3. Gospel of Mark, p.192.

his association with John, Jesus became increasingly conscious of his vocation as Messiah. Otherwise, it is hard to understand how he pictures the Kingdom almost as a present reality in virtue of his own work.

Again, it is evident that while Jesus, like John, insisted upon repentance as a preparation for the Consummation, Jesus deepened and extended the idea of repentance quite beyond John's horizon of thought. For John, it is true, repentance was to be from the heart, but apparently he failed to enunciate precisely how this was to be achieved. Jesus, on the other hand, clearly showed the way. For him, repentance meant nothing less than a renewal of the whole moral nature of man by obedience to the will of God, and fundamental to this obedience, were the qualities of love and forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, in his insistence upon obedience to the will of God as embracing the duties of love and forgiveness, Jesus was not announcing a theory unparalleled in the best Rabbinic thought of his time, and it is fatally easy to draw too sharp a contrast between the thought of Jesus and the teaching of the Rabbis. But, as far as John is concerned, the distinction is acute, and John's failure to enunciate a satisfactory and thorough-going principle of moral re-

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1. Matt.5:43-48; 18:21; Lk.6:36.

formation may be largely explained by his one-sided view of the functions of the Messiah. For John, the Messiah would be principally a pitiless Judge, whose chief function would be condemnation. For Jesus, the Messiah was a merciful Judge, who would not only condemn but save. Thus when Jesus began his own ministry there was in it a new element. While not minimising the justice of God and the anger of God, he brought into greater prominence the mercy of God and the love of God, and he showed how these attributes could be reconciled. Hence his insistence that men, in their turn, should show love and forgiveness towards others, for by the exercise of these qualities men are truly obedient to God's will. In this way, Jesus gave fundamental content to his programme of human renewal, and unlike John, enunciated a thorough-going principle by which the programme might be carried out.

But the thought of Jesus regarding repentance went even deeper than this. Whereas John had announced that the repentance demanded by his baptism would ensure the access of men to the Kingdom, Jesus declared that no matter to what extent men repented they were not thereby entitled by right to enter the Kingdom. For Jesus, even the repentant sinner is still God's debtor, and can make

no claim of his own upon the forgiveness of God. God's forgiveness is a free gift, and as such can only be accepted, and not demanded by men as a reward for virtuous actions. A whole series of parables and sayings illustrate this concept. It is very clear in the story of the Pharisee and the tax-collector, 'Two men went up to the Temple to pray, the one, a Pharisee, the other, a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men, thieves, evil-doers, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast every week and give a tenth of all that I get. But the tax-collector stood at a distance and would not even lift up his eyes, but beat his breast and said, God have mercy on me, a sinner. I tell you, he went home justified rather than the other.'<sup>1</sup> In this story the Pharisee is reproved by Jesus for making an exhibition of his virtue, and consequently, for not realising the true nature of the forgiveness of God. The tax-collector, on the other hand, is commended for perceiving the utter helplessness of his position before God and for accepting God's forgiveness as a free gift. Again, in Matt. 18:23-35, the parable of the merciless creditor shows very plainly that even though one man forgives the other, he is not thereby

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1. Lk. 18:10-14.

entitled to God's pardon. Often the poor and humble are the first to perceive that God's forgiveness is a free gift. 'Truly, I tell you, tax-collectors and harlots, shall enter the Kingdom of God before you'<sup>1</sup> and again, 'Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.'<sup>2</sup>

As Bultmann puts it, "All these words are directed against those who cannot realise what God's grace and forgiveness are, who do not understand that man can receive God's goodness only as a gift and that, therefore, it is only the sinner who really knows what grace is."<sup>3</sup> It is unnecessary to discuss by what psychological process Jesus arrived at this conviction. Ultimately such a concept is explicable only in the mystery of his Personality. More important is it to grasp that by the enunciation of this conviction Jesus did not minimise in any way the absolute necessity of the repentance of man as conditional for his participation in the Kingdom; rather, repentance must be extended to cover the idea that God's forgiveness is a free gift. Thus, while for John, the Kingdom was attainable by man's efforts alone, for Jesus, the Kingdom was essentially a gift of God. In Goguel's words, "John thought that the initiative of salvation comes from men, since it is they who wish to find the prophet and since

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1. Matt.21:28-31.

2. Lk.6:20.

3. Jesus and the Word, p.206.

it is by their repentance that they will escape judgment. In the Gospel, on the contrary, the first step is taken by the Envoy of God who calls sinners and goes to them. Salvation does not come from men, but solely from God who gives his pardon and opens the way to the Kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

There seems to be little doubt that during his association with John Jesus perceived very acutely the inadequacy of the Baptist's view of the Messiah and repentance, and it is precisely this which explains, in part, the ultimate separation of Jesus from him. But this, perhaps, was not the sole reason for his departure from John. Not merely did certain parts of the Baptist's teaching require supplementing, but certain of his practices, if what immediately follows has any claim to historicity, appeared to Jesus unnecessary. To these attention may now be given.

With regard to the Baptist's attitude to the Law, it was pointed out that there is no evidence that John ever criticised the Law. On the contrary, he appears to have enjoined upon his disciples the customary Jewish fasts as laid down by the Law. Jesus, on the other hand, imposed no such rules on his disciples, and the contrast between the fasting of John's disciples and the non-fasting of

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1. Jean-Baptiste, p.269.

Jesus' disciples was a hotly debated topic.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Jesus himself drew attention to the distinction. 'John came neither eating nor drinking and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, Behold a wine-bibber, a glutton, and a friend of publicans and sinners.'<sup>2</sup> What is the explanation of this remarkable difference of practice? Surely it is not, as is sometimes supposed, that Jesus intended to set aside the Law! 'Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily, I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law till all be fulfilled.'<sup>3</sup> This saying is particularly illuminating. It illustrates, on the one hand, the conservative attitude of Jesus towards the Law, and, on the other, the new and fuller interpretation he proposed to give to it. Jesus came not to destroy the Law but to fulfil it, i.e. to fill the Law full, to reveal the whole meaning of the Law, to make it include things not commonly accepted as falling within its range. Now the one demand of Jesus was that men should obey the will of God as revealed in his Word, but the very essence of this obedience was threatened by a conformity to the Law

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1. Mk.2:18ff. = Matt.9:14ff.

2. Matt.11:18-19 = Lk.7:33-37.

3. Matt.5:17-18.



such as the common interpretation of its contents enjoined. For by this interpretation external rites and ceremonies were regarded as pleasing to God as such, while no account was taken of the motive and the moral principles underlying them. Hence the fierce denunciation of the Pharisees, 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, you clean the outside only, cup and platter, but within you are full of theft and selfishness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees. You are like whitewashed graves which appear clean outside, but within are a mass of dead bones and filth. So you appear righteous before the people, but within you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.'<sup>1</sup>

Outward conformity to legal rites was useless without an inward understanding of the true nature of the will of God, and it was precisely because of the danger that the emphasis might be laid upon externals rather than upon the motive that Jesus, as contrasted with John, laid down no rules for fasting to be observed by his followers. For it is true that in the act of fasting there does arise a very grave danger of confusing the issue. This may explain the saying of Jesus, 'When ye fast do not put on, as the hypocrites do, a mournful face; for they disfigure their faces that they may be seen by men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their re-

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1. Matt.23:25, 27, 28. Cf. Matt.23:13.

ward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou may be seen to fast not unto men, but unto thy Father.<sup>1</sup> In other words, men, if fast they will, should pay attention to the motive of their fasting. Only then is fasting permissible and a true sign of repentance. But it seems clear that the saying of Jesus just given is in no way to be interpreted as an injunction to fast, nor as showing that Jesus conceived that by fasting men gain any special quality in God's sight. In the last resort, Jesus demanded of men no particular asceticism, but simply the will to renounce and to make sacrifices in a general way. To quote Bultmann once more, "Man does not have to achieve for himself particular qualities, either an especial virtue or an especial saintliness: he must simply be obedient, and for that he needs no special qualities: God is not far from him so that a technique is necessary to approach him; on the contrary, God speaks to him in every concrete situation, for every concrete situation is a crisis of decision. Man has, so to speak, no time for any pre-occupation with asceticism."<sup>2</sup> It was this conviction, among others, which led Jesus, perhaps, to part company with the Baptist and to abandon in his own ministry a

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1. Matt.6:16-18.

2. Op.cit., pp.101-102.

practice, which however widespread in his day, appeared to him unnecessary.

Now if this is the true explanation of Jesus' attitude towards fasting, it may be applied with double force and cogency towards his attitude to the rite of baptism, and it is just here, perhaps, that the crucial point is reached, for a correct understanding of the relations of Jesus and John the Baptist.

Although arguments from silence are precarious, it can scarcely be without significance that there is no primitive tradition that Jesus himself baptised.<sup>1</sup> This statement may stand for two very good reasons. First, if Jesus had really baptised, it is quite unthinkable, in view of the attention which John's rite aroused, that mention would not have been made of Jesus' adoption of the same practice. Second, and more compelling, it is practically certain that the Evangelists would have justified the Church's practice of baptism by frequently referring to the practice of Jesus himself, that is, if they had had any real warrant for so doing. Such a warrant, however, they do not seem to have possessed - hence the necessity of putting the injunction to baptise upon the lips of Jesus in his parting commission.<sup>2</sup> Neither

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1. Cf. chapter III, p.149ff.

2. Matt.28:19, cf. Mk.16:16, a verse belonging to the Longer Ending of Mark, (16:9-20). The Longer Ending is widely regarded as non-authentic.

in its Matthaean nor in its Marcan form can the injunction be regarded as primitive, nor can the Fourth Evangelist's reference to the practice be considered as anything other than a creation of his own imagination.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly it appears to be almost certain that Jesus himself did not baptise.

There are, however, two passages in the Gospels which, at first sight, might suggest that Jesus did not regard with any dubiety John's practice of baptism. On being questioned on one occasion by the religious opposition as to his authority for preaching in the Temple, Jesus replied, 'Let me ask you a question. Tell me, did the baptism of John come from heaven or from men?'<sup>2</sup> This question threw the religious authorities into a dilemma because, as W.Manson puts it, "to derive the authority of John from heaven lays them open to the charge of having opposed the will of God through their refusal to be baptised. To derive it from men, i.e. to say that John had no divine authority is to outrage public opinion which, at this moment, is solidly on the side of Jesus. In this predicament they answer that they have no knowledge where John's authority comes from."<sup>3</sup> It is necessary, however, to expand this statement a little. There can be no doubt

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1. John 3:22ff. Cf. chapter II.

2. Matt.21:23ff. = Lk.20:1ff.

3. Gospel of Luke, p.220.

that Jesus himself, derived John's baptism from heaven, but this being so, it seems to have been only in a very particular way that Jesus meant that the religious opposition was opposing God's will by refusing John's baptism. It is difficult to believe that when Jesus used the word 'baptism' he meant thereby the rite of baptism in the narrow sense, and not rather the prophetic message and work of John in the widest sense. If this be so, the meaning would be that the religious authorities by refusing to associate themselves with John's call to repentance, which his baptism demanded, showed their opposition thereby to God's will. The emphasis, therefore, is not actually upon the rite of baptism itself but upon the moral renewal for which it stood. Curiously enough this impression is strengthened by the second of the passages which at first sight might suggest the opposite view. A comparison of the Mattaeian and the Lucan version of the saying is most instructive. According to Matthew, shortly after the episode just referred to, Jesus is reported as saying to the opposition, 'For John came unto you in the way of righteousness and you believed him not: but the publicans and harlots believed him: and you, when you had seen it, repented not afterward, that you might believe him.'<sup>1</sup> Luke incorporates the saying in the body of Jesus'

1. Matt.21:32..

discourse upon John, and gives it as follows, 'And all the people that heard him and the publicans justified God being baptised with the Baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves being not baptised of him.'<sup>1</sup> It is doubtful whether the Lucan version can be regarded as a primitive saying of Jesus. One suspects rather that it is an explanatory parenthesis of the Evangelist in view of the enigmatic saying which follows in v.35, 'Wisdom is vindicated by all her children.' Peculiarly Lucan are the words, 'All the people'. Yet even although there might be some hesitation in rejecting the saying, the Matthaean version shows its true interpretation. Once again, there is no emphasis on the rite of baptism itself as justifying men in the sight of God. The emphasis seems to be entirely upon repentance, and it was for this that John's baptism stood.

It is precisely along these lines that point may be given to the important passage in the Fourth Gospel concerning Jesus' discussion with John regarding baptism.<sup>2</sup> The real nature of the discussion has, as already noted, been obscured by the Evangelist, but it is difficult not to think that the original conversation was related to the

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1. Lk.7:29-30..

2. Jn.3:22ff.

efficacy of the rite. It can hardly have escaped Jesus that many would see in John's rite an easy means of escaping the moral efforts which the baptism in reality demanded. The baptised would readily ascribe to it a sacramental efficacy which would, they hoped, in itself secure their salvation on the day of Judgment. There is no trace of any such idea in the original teaching of Jesus. He did not conceive that men could approach God in a special manner through any cult or sacrament. His one command was that men should obey the will of God as revealed in his Word. For by so obeying, men shew that their thoughts and activities are centred upon the ultimate triumph of good over evil, and thereby declare themselves for the Kingdom of God as opposed to the Kingdom of Satan.

It is not surprising that there is very little evidence in the Gospels regarding the true attitude of Jesus towards baptism. Admittedly, it is possible that Jesus referred to the matter very seldom, but when it is recalled that the early Church had adopted the rite by the time the Gospels were being written, one wonders whether the Evangelists themselves may not have selected their material on this delicate matter with especial care! As compared with the apparent silence of the Synoptists, the Fourth Evangelist quite unintentionally sheds a peculiarly penetrating

ray of light upon the thought of Jesus on this important issue. His evidence is invaluable. Using in all probability the memoirs of an eye-witness of the early years, he may have found in these memoirs the story of a discussion between Jesus and John on the subject of the efficacy of baptism. But such a discussion in its original form was eminently unsuitable for his Gospel both for the reason already mentioned, and because of his desire to bring Jesus and John together, baptising side by side. Accordingly he reserves his material to a later point and uses it to introduce the account of the final testimony of John to Jesus.

But is it really the case that the Synoptists are completely silent on the matter? Is there not an isolated saying of Jesus to buttress the hint supplied by the Fourth Evangelist? Perhaps there is. It is in this sense that a very satisfactory explanation may be given of the obscure and difficult words of Jesus as reported by Matthew, 'From the days of John the Baptist, until now, the Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and violent men take it by force.'<sup>1</sup> This saying calls for very particular examination.

Neither in its Matthaean nor in its Lucan setting

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1. Matt.11:12 = Lk.16:16.



can this saying of Jesus be regarded as integral to the context. In Matthew, the saying occurs in the middle of Jesus' discourse on the Baptist, (11:7ff.), but whereas the theme of the discourse is John, the theme of this saying is clearly not John, but the Kingdom. Similarly in Luke, the saying occurs in a group of isolated sayings of Jesus emphasising the eternal nature of the Law, (16:16-18). But obviously the particular saying under discussion has no direct connection with this issue.<sup>1</sup>

For the sake of clarity the two versions of the saying may be set side by side:-

Matthew.

'And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied (sc. of the Kingdom) till John.'

Luke.

'The Law and the prophets ( ) until John: since that time the Kingdom of God is preached and every man presses his way into it.'

It is not without significance that the reference to the Law and the prophets appears in Matthew after, and in Luke, before, the saying on the Kingdom. It is plain that Matthew has attempted to run the two sayings together and to explain the former by means of the latter. But his choice of the word 'prophesied' is surely peculiarly

1. Cf. Dibelius: J.d.T., pp.23ff.

unhappy, for it is difficult to conceive of the Law prophesying the Kingdom. There can be little doubt, therefore, that the Lucan version, 'The Law and the prophets (were) until John', is primitive. On the other hand, it is equally clear that Luke has drawn the two sayings together in the reverse order with a view to establishing an even closer connection between the two for reasons of his own which will presently be explained. Now if Luke's version is substituted for Matthew's version and inserted in the present position of Matt.11:10,<sup>1</sup> the text of the speech of Jesus becomes perfectly intelligible, as follows:

'Why did you go out then? Was it to see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, more than a prophet. For all the prophets and the Law were until John. Verily I say unto you, among them that were born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.' Originally then, the sayings on the Kingdom and on the Law and the prophets were unconnected.

Of the two versions of the saying on the Kingdom, Matthew's is almost certainly the more primitive. It is the lectio difficilior, and Dibelius is surely correct when he writes, "The Lucan version gives expression to a

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1. Reasons for omitting v.10 appear in Section (c) of this chapter. V.10 seems to have ousted v.13 from its true position.

universal missionary idea lacking in the Matthaean version: the Kingdom of God is preached (ἐὺαγγελίζεταί ) and every one 'presses into it' or 'is pressed into it'.<sup>1</sup> Surely this is very characteristic of Luke's Gospel! Again, whereas in Matthew, the saying embraces three distinct periods, Luke reduces the periods to two. Thus: the Matthaean version refers to something that was happening to the Kingdom only during the days of John the Baptist, and not before his time, nor after it. The Lucan version refers to something that was happening only after the days of John the Baptist, and not during his time. As Luke conceives it, what was happening was that men were eagerly pressing into the Kingdom opened to them by the teaching of Jesus, as it had never been by the Law and the prophets including John the Baptist. However beautiful the thought, it probably reflects a typical Lucan interpretation of the harder saying of Jesus in Matthew's version. And it is for this reason that Luke has altered the order of the two sayings referred to above. The crucial point is whether the primitive version of Matthew can in any way bear this interpretation. Clearly the Matthaean form must be examined independently and not interpreted, as is usually done, in the light of the Lucan parallel.

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1. Op.cit., pp.23-24.

Opinions differ as to whether the Matthaean version is to be understood in a good or a bad sense, the key words being βασιλεύεται, βασισταὶ and ἀεπάζουσι. Can these words bear a favourable meaning? Harnack believes that they can, and advances seven arguments in support of his view.<sup>1</sup> Dibelius thinks that they cannot, and his criticism of Harnack's theory appears to the present writer to be very convincing. The following points require attention:-

(a) Should βασιλεύεται be regarded as a middle or a passive? In the former case, the translation would be, 'The Kingdom of heaven forces itself' (upon men's attention); in the latter 'The Kingdom of heaven is forced.' Harnack argues for the middle, because the present passive use of βασιλέω is extremely rare. There are, however, examples of the passive use, and Dibelius points out that the passive is strongly supported by the following βασισταὶ.<sup>2</sup>

(b) Does ἀεπάζουσι bear a good or a bad meaning? In the former case, the translation would be, 'Violent men seize it', (rightfully), in the latter, 'Violent men seize

1. Sitzungsberichte der Königl. Preuss. Akad. der Wissen., Berlin, 1907, pp. 947ff.

2. Cf. M. and M.: Vocabulary, p. 109b. "That βασιλεύεται can be passive, as all the ancient versions assume, may be illustrated by such evidence as Oxy. ii. 294: 16 (A.D. 22) ἐγὼ δε βασιζομαι ὑπὸ φίλων. Cf. βασιζομαι τὰδε in Sophocles (Antig. 66), "I am forced to it."

it', (by robbery). Now it is open to very grave doubt whether Jesus taught that men could seize the Kingdom, even rightfully. It would seem rather that Jesus regarded the Kingdom always as a gift of God, to which men were not in their own right entitled. The bringing in of the Kingdom lay entirely in God's hands, and man's duty was to prepare himself, to repent, and to await the day in patience. Nor, apparently, did Jesus teach men that they could influence God to hurry on the advent of the Kingdom. Surely it is not in this sense that the petition, 'Thy Kingdom come', is to be interpreted. The purpose of the petition is not to alter God's eternal plan, but to show that the petitioner's mind is wholly centred on the Kingdom as the supreme fact for which all else must be sacrificed. It is true that there are certain indications that the parables of the importunate widow, and the traveller at midnight, referred originally not to prayer in general but to prayer for the coming of the Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> But this is uncertain. Certainly Jesus seems to have encouraged a certain importunity in prayer in general, assuring men that God would hear their prayers and answer them. Otherwise it is impossible to understand the sayings, 'Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it

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1. Lk. 18:7,8.

shall be opened unto you.'<sup>1</sup> But it is not altogether easy to believe that Jesus included prayer for the Kingdom within this category. The attitude of Jesus is one of implicit trust in the Fatherhood of God and in the Purposes of God, and to him he leaves the directing and ordering of all things. The Kingdom belonged to God, and could not, accordingly, be rightfully seized by men. All that men can do is to prepare themselves, and others, for the Reign of God. It is to be presumed, therefore, that the saying, 'Violent men seize it', indicates that men were seizing, or rather attempting to seize, the Kingdom, unlawfully. This impression seems to be confirmed by the sense of the word  $\acute{\alpha}\rho\eta\tau\acute{\iota}\sigma\iota\varsigma$  which is practically always used with the idea of seizing something by robbery. As Dibelius puts it, "So commonly is the word employed suggesting an injustice ... that we cannot depart from this idea without very compelling reasons."<sup>2</sup>

(c) The enclitics, ( $\delta\epsilon$  v.12), and ( $\gamma\alpha\rho$  v.13), which, for Harnack, lend support to a favourable interpretation of the saying cannot be seriously considered in view of the fact that the saying is an isolated one inserted into a context to which it was originally foreign (see above).

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1. Matt.7:7 = Lk.11:9. Cf. also the stories of the paralytic at Capernaum, the Syrophenician woman, the blind man by the wayside, and Zacchaeus.  
 2. Op.cit., p.25.

Admitting, then, that the saying is to be understood in an unfavourable sense, and that it refers to an unwarranted attempt to seize the Kingdom in the interval between the past and the commencement of the ministry of Jesus, i.e. in the interval occupied by the activity of John the Baptist,<sup>1</sup> it is possible, perhaps, to interpret it in only one really satisfactory way. It can scarcely refer quite innocuously to the eager rush of the Baptist's hearers to enter the Kingdom in response to his preaching, as Luke's version indicates.<sup>2</sup> Nor can it altogether fittingly refer to the misguided zeal of the Zealots who wished to bring in the Kingdom by force instead of awaiting the time of God's good pleasure.<sup>3</sup> It is true that this explanation is in some ways attractive in the light of what was said above about the Kingdom being entirely in the Providence of God, but, on the other hand, it is difficult to see why the activity of the Zealots should have been narrowed down simply and solely to the period of John the Baptist. Surely they continued their political propaganda long after the Baptist was dead and gone! Finally, Dibelius himself, rather ingeniously, refers the saying to the unseen powers of the world, to the evil

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1. Not in the interval between the end of John's ministry and the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, as Dibelius seems to understand it.

2. So Otto: op.cit., pp.108-112.

3. So T.W.Manson: op.cit., p.124, note 2.

spirits, whom Paul describes as 'the rulers of this age' and interprets it as meaning that since the time of John the Baptist these spirit-powers had been bringing the Kingdom, which existed first from John's days, into their own possession. It is very doubtful, however, whether the saying implies that the Kingdom existed first from John's days, and even though this meaning is rather arbitrarily read into it, there is no reason for assuming that the activity of these Geistermächte would have been regarded by Jesus as specially dangerous in the interval between John's ministry and the beginning of his own ministry, if, indeed, the saying could be considered as referring to this interval. In any case, the theory is perhaps a little far-fetched. To arrive at what may be the true interpretation of the saying, something must be looked for which was taking place in relation to the Kingdom pre-eminently during the ministry of John the Baptist. Immediately John's baptismal rite is thought of, novel in its execution, by means of which the Baptist added a spectacular appeal to his demand for repentance in view of the nearness of the Kingdom. Now even though it be granted that for John himself the rite had no sacramental efficacy, it is almost certain that many of the baptised regarded it as possessing this power. If this



be so, the saying may well refer to those violent ones who imagined that they could seize the Kingdom simply by undergoing John's water-baptism, without, on the one hand, fulfilling John's demand for repentance, and without, on the other, realising that the Kingdom was essentially a gift of God. In this sense the saying may be linked up quite admirably with the rest of the teaching of Jesus regarding the Kingdom, and it would imply that with Jesus himself (*Veri*) the practice of baptism had ceased, and accordingly, no longer afforded the violent ones any ground for imagining that they could seize the Kingdom of heaven in this way.

Objection might be taken to this interpretation of the saying on the ground that Jesus himself accepted John's baptism. Had Jesus been really dubious as to the advisability of continuing the practice, would he have presented himself to John as willing to undergo his rite? To answer this question definitely an insight would be required into the psychology of the mind of Jesus such as is impossible to gain. Yet from the knowledge of the Personality of Jesus which the New Testament affords, and in the light of the nature of John's baptism previously explained, there seems to be no insuperable objection to the idea that, although Jesus thought it undesirable to continue John's baptismal rite, he nevertheless most readily allowed himself to be

baptised by John. There was in the Personality of Jesus a universalism and a width of vision which enabled him to perceive not merely the danger of the rite being regarded as a key, so to speak, to unlock the doors of the Kingdom, but also to look beyond this aspect of the practice to its real and true significance. It was a baptism whose demand was repentance, and it was in this way, and in this way alone, that it was offered by John to his hearers. As such, it cannot but have appealed to Jesus himself, who, no less than John, insisted upon the necessity of repentance. Jesus, then, could perfectly naturally accept John's baptism as symbolising the change of heart which was to be the central theme of his own ministry. It is unnecessary to argue why the sinless Jesus should have suffered himself to have been baptised by John, unnecessary to evolve abstruse Christological or theological doctrines to explain or to justify this step. The real explanation is perhaps surprisingly simple. John had touched a chord in the heart of Jesus, and Jesus' acceptance of John's baptism was a final token of his approval of those aspects of the Baptist's thought which chimed in with his own. It was a final gesture of friendship and appreciation such as one friend might render to another. Thereafter, conscious through his baptismal experience that the time was at hand to begin his own ministry, conscious of

the approval of God, Jesus left the Baptist with full knowledge of the ways in which he would perpetuate, modify, or abandon his predecessor's thought and practices.<sup>1</sup>

In the light of this exposition of the thought of Jesus and the thought of John, it is possible to see very clearly both the strength and the weakness of John the Baptist. It is possible to see also how the Evangelists have done less justice to him as a preacher in his own right and how they have tended to overstress his affinities to Jesus. At the same time the way is cleared for establishing with considerable certainty the nature of the relations between John and Jesus. The following points may be noted.

There cannot be the slightest doubt that John had profoundly impressed Jesus. This is clear not merely from the explicit testimony of Jesus to John, to be examined presently, but perhaps even more so from Jesus' perpetuation of certain aspects of the Baptist's ministry. This argues, on the one

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1. The fact that the disciples allowed baptism to become the outward sign of admission into the Church is not a grave objection to this theory. The origin of Christian Baptism has already been explained, and to this may be added these considerations: (i) That tradition would tend to lose sight of the original nature of Jesus' difference with John, because it did not lead to an immediate break in the relations of Jesus and John, and because Jesus probably said very little on the matter, out of deference to his predecessor, allowing his non-adoption of the practice to speak for itself. (ii) That all the practices of the Early Church, apart from baptism, cannot be traced to the direct injunctions of our Lord. (iii) That sacramentalism is an obvious and almost inevitable development in the growth of religions.

hand, for a much longer contact between Jesus and John than the Gospels allow, and on the other, for a much longer independent ministry on John's part. The Synoptists reduce the period of contact between Jesus and John to the moment of the baptism of Jesus. In so doing they have almost certainly passed over in silence a very important formative period in the life and thought of Jesus.

But if the Synoptists have shortened the period of contact between Jesus and John, the Fourth Evangelist has represented the period of contact as taking place after the baptism of Jesus. He represents Jesus as recruiting his disciples from those of John, as preaching and baptising side by side with John, and as having an explicit testimony rendered to him by John as 'the Lamb of God who is to remove the sin of the world.' It has already been shown that practically the whole of this account does not seem to rest on genuine tradition. There is other and better evidence that Jesus did not recruit his disciples from those of John, and that the ministries of John and Jesus did not overlap. The difficulty of harmonising the Synoptic and the Johannine versions of the call of the disciples has been noted, and attention has been drawn to the colourless and incorrect role of John as witness in the Fourth Gospel. At the same time, there is reason

to believe that the reference to the discussion regarding the efficacy of baptism may be primitive, when pruned of its characteristically Johannine additions. This discussion has been post-dated by the Fourth Evangelist to a point subsequent to the baptism of Jesus in order to fit in with the general chronological sequence of the Gospel. If the evidence of the Fourth Evangelist of a longer contact between Jesus and John be linked up with the impression to the same effect given indirectly by the Synoptists, and if the period of contact be placed in its correct position before the baptism of Jesus, the following picture will result.

Jesus had heard in Galilee of the ministry of John the Baptist, a ministry which from all reports he believed to answer so well to his own aspirations and preoccupations. Desirous of seeing and hearing the preacher for himself, he left Galilee, accompanied by some friends who afterwards became his disciples. Among the group may have been Peter whose reminiscences of these early stages Mark has apparently almost completely obliterated. These early stages explain, in turn, the readiness with which the disciples of Jesus later responded to his formal call, and, at the same time, may underlie the narrative of the Fourth Evangelist who post-dates the events to a point of time after the

baptism of Jesus. Jesus and his friends made their way to Aenon near to Salim, not far from Galilee, where John was baptising. Jesus was at once impressed by John's proclamation of the coming of the Messiah to inaugurate the Kingdom, by the universalism of its membership implicit in his thought, and by his demand for repentance, but at the same time he may have felt that the rite of baptism which John offered was being popularly interpreted as in itself securing salvation and as entitling access to the Kingdom. To this interpretation, as well as to John's sombre view of a pitiless Messiah, Jesus, conscious from his youth of the Love and Providence of God, conscious, too, that the Kingdom was a gift of God and unattainable by human effort, was from the very first opposed. At this point, accordingly, the discussion regarding the efficacy of baptism arose between Jesus and John, referred to by the Fourth Evangelist.<sup>1</sup> Apparently, however, this did not take the form of a clash, nor did it immediately lead to anything like a rupture in the relations of Jesus

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1. It is impossible to determine precisely how the Fourth Evangelist obtained this information. That it is not an invention is shown by the nature of its contents. No one would have invented a discussion between Jesus and John on the efficacy of baptism. The most feasible explanation of its origin may be that one of the Galileans who accompanied Jesus on his pilgrimage to John, imparted the information to the Beloved Disciple, the Jerusalemite, whose memoirs the Fourth Evangelist appears to have used. The latter, however, has radically altered its original sense and setting.

and John. Jesus continued to move in the company of pilgrims who flocked to hear John's preaching, but he did not join John's 'inner circle' of disciples. During this period of contact, Jesus carefully weighed and tested the value of the thought and practices of John, perhaps frequently questioning John, and thereby arousing the Baptist's interest in this Pilgrim as one distinct from the usual run. But as yet John never dreamed that Jesus might be the Messiah whose coming he announced. After a time John moved on to the Jordan district and Jesus accompanied him. The relations between the two increased in friendliness. By then Jesus could appreciate very precisely both the strength and the weakness of the Baptist's activity, testing it against his own convictions, and growing more and more conscious as time passed, of the Love and Fatherhood of God. Feeling, at length, that the time was at hand for him to begin his own Work, and fully realising that the rite of baptism as offered by his friend signified for John no more than a demand for repentance, a demand which Jesus ardently shared, he accepted John's baptism and at that moment received God's assurance of his approval. Jesus did not intend, however, to start alongside of John an opposition ministry. He left John's company, and spent a time of close communion in prayer with his Father, and

it was, it would seem, the arrest of John the Baptist which finally convinced Jesus that he must at once begin his own ministry. His friend lay helpless in prison. The signs of the times were unmistakable. The hour had come for Jesus himself to lift up his Voice and to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. The hour had come for him on the one hand to perpetuate those aspects of his predecessor's thought which harmonised completely with his own, and, on the other, to modify or abandon those other aspects which to his unique Personality appeared unnecessary. It was then that Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, a ministry which in part resembled that of John, but which from the very first bore a new and original emphasis.

It seems evident, then, that the picture presented by the Synoptists and the Fourth Evangelist of the relations of Jesus and John, as well as of the activity of John himself, corresponds only in part to what actually took place. It is not exact that the activity of John lasted for such a short time as the Synoptists suggest. It is not exact that the relations of Jesus and John reduced themselves to a brief moment of contact at the baptism of Jesus. It is not exact that the ministries of Jesus and John overlapped, as the Fourth Evangelist indicates, nor that Jesus recruited his disciples from those of John, nor that John



bore witness to Jesus as the Messiah. On the other hand, it is exact that Jesus did not begin his own ministry till John was imprisoned. It is exact that the ministry of Jesus was original from the outset and not a direct continuation of John's in all its aspects. From the first, Jesus, while continuing the non-political attitude of John, while sharing his eschatological view of the Kingdom and subscribing to the universality of its membership and the need for repentance, at the same time modified his predecessor's sombre view of the Messiah, and declared that admission to the Kingdom was in the last resort a gift of God, depending upon man's free acceptance of God's forgiveness as revealed in his Word. Finally, from the very outset, the activity of Jesus differed from John's in that Jesus did not enjoin upon his disciples any rules for fasting or for baptism.

If it is not altogether easy to believe that the Synoptists give the exact picture of the relations of Jesus and John, it seems impossible to do so in the case of the Fourth Evangelist. The impression is that, as far as the Synoptists are concerned, the Baptist has been left in the shadow, mainly, although not entirely, because the Evangelists were interested primarily in Jesus, and only subsidiarily in John himself. Nothing is said of

the earlier relations of Jesus and John, not so much, perhaps, with a view to discrediting the idea that John could be regarded as a patron of Jesus, but because the Evangelists had no real concern with anything but Jesus' own public ministry. So far as John interested them, it was only in his capacity as immediate predecessor and baptiser of Jesus. It is not surprising, therefore, that they integrate him in the Gospel, to an extent to which he had no real claim. The Fourth Evangelist, on the other hand, has a polemical aim in view, and the relations of Jesus and John seem to be constructed to serve that end. The Baptist is robbed of his independent ministry and personality and becomes not merely the forerunner, but the witness to Jesus. Not content with this, the Fourth Evangelist points out that in the last resort John's witness was really unimportant, almost superfluous. The works that Jesus did were a much more convincing proof of his Divine mission than John's witness.<sup>1</sup> Finally, no better instance of the polemical aim of the author can be found than in the scene where John's disciples pass over to Jesus. The Fourth Evangelist is reading a lesson to these Christians of his day who appear to have been unduly influenced by the exalted claims made for the Baptist by some of the Jews.

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1. Jn. 5:32ff.

He instructs them to observe how John's disciples went over to Jesus at their master's express bidding. His readers, therefore, should resolutely oppose the Jewish propaganda in favour of the Baptist, and bring themselves into line with what, as he represents them, were the historical processes of the past.

(C) To examine, in conclusion, the personality of John and the thought of Jesus, it is necessary to return to the speech of Jesus on the Baptist as reported in Matt. 11:7ff. = Lk.7:24ff.. Two points of vital importance are of interest here. First, the public identification of John with the Elijah; and second, the words, 'Notwithstanding, he that is only small in the Kingdom is greater than he' (John). Obviously, it is impossible to assign these two pronouncements to the same occasion, and it may be asked whether either of them can be regarded as integral to the thought of Jesus.

It is, admittedly, very strange to find included in a panegyric on the Baptist so trenchant a criticism as is contained in the words, 'Notwithstanding he that is only small in the Kingdom is greater than he.' The Matthaean and the Lucan texts of the words immediately preceding this statement require careful comparison. Matthew has, 'There hath not arisen among those born of women a greater

than John the Baptist.' Luke  $\mathcal{NB}$  has, 'Among them born of women there is no one greater than John.' Luke  $\mathcal{AD}$  has, 'Among them born of women there is no greater prophet than John.' The priority undoubtedly rests with Matthew and Luke  $\mathcal{NB}$  as against Luke  $\mathcal{AD}$ . By the addition of the 'prophet' Luke  $\mathcal{AD}$  betrays a limitation and a softening of the original words of Jesus to render them less offensive to the early Christian community. Luke  $\mathcal{NB}$  and Matthew might imply that John was greater than Jesus himself. Luke  $\mathcal{AD}$  excludes this possibility, establishing by inference the superiority of Jesus. To decide between Matthew and Luke  $\mathcal{NB}$  is difficult. Perhaps Luke  $\mathcal{NB}$ , being slightly wider and more general than Matthew, should be preferred. The text will then run, 'Verily I say unto you, Among them born of women there is no one greater than John, but he who is only small in the Kingdom is greater than he.'

Now if the original words of Jesus have been altered here once, further alterations might be all the more readily expected. On grammatical grounds, it does not seem that the words, 'No one is greater', followed by 'He that is smaller is greater', hang together at all naturally. As Dibelius puts it, "The first expression is very strong: it gives the Baptist an outstanding position. The follow-

ing limitation, judged by the superlative of the first sentence, is not merely a limitation but a definite negation. We do not say, 'No one is greater', when we intend to add immediately thereafter, not an exception, but to invalidate, for the most part, our previous statement."<sup>1</sup>

It is probable, therefore, that v.11B, whether an original saying of Jesus or not, is not in its correct position, at least, at this point.

Can it be supposed, then, that the expression, though wrongly inserted here, was an original word of Jesus? Probably not. Jesus seems to have believed that the Kingdom was identical with the Age to Come, and that its influences could be felt even then. Now it would be exceedingly strange if Jesus had publicly proclaimed that John was less than any member who would enter the Kingdom, especially in view of the fact that John had spent his energies in preparing men for the coming of the Kingdom. So hard a saying, in the light of John's work and of the friendly relations between Jesus and John, is scarcely explicable. It is to be observed, moreover, that in this particular saying, the Kingdom is described as a present reality. This, in itself, does not provide sufficient grounds for rejecting the saying, because it is possible that Jesus is

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1. J.d.T., p.13, with reference to Franz Dibelius, Z.N.T.W., 1910, p.190, "After v.11a it is impossible to continue that a large number of people are greater than John."

here dramatically picturing a future event as a present reality. On the other hand it is difficult not to ask whether the Kingdom in this saying should not be identified with the early Church. Other examples of this appear, as already noted, in the Gospels.<sup>1</sup> This impression is strengthened by the textual alterations in the first half of the verse, by the grammatical difficulty referred to above, and by the altogether too harsh connotation of the words if used by Jesus referring to the New Age. The saying seems to be a product of early Christology, and illustrates a continuation of the process begun by the insertion of the word 'prophet' in Luke AD. The early Church was unwilling to admit that John who had never been baptised by Jesus could be regarded as 'the greatest of men born of women'. But the limitation to the greater 'prophet' born of women was not sufficient. To clinch the matter, and to establish finally the superiority of Jesus, also 'born of women' (Gal.4:4), the sweeping negation was added, 'But he who is only small in the Church is greater than he.'<sup>2</sup>

The only objection to this line of interpretation is

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1. Matt.16:19; 13:47, etc.

2. The conscious lowering of John's position in this way need not be regarded as evidence for a continuing Baptist group. Christological interests quite well explain the origin of this saying.

the fact that the saying occurs in all reconstructions of Q, and is therefore, presumably, primitive. This objection, however, is not in reality so serious as it might at first appear, because in the words of Jackson and Lake, 'these reconstructions of Q are in the main mechanical compilations of material common to Matthew and Luke which may have been used in common late as well as early sources.'<sup>1</sup>

If, then, these words are omitted, and if it be assumed for the moment that Matt. 11:13 should be placed in the present position of Matt. 11:10, it is possible, perhaps, to assign the text of the speech of Jesus from Matt. 11:7ff. to one occasion, and it would run as follows, 'And as the deputation departed, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, Why then, did you go out into the wilderness? Was it to see a reed shaken by the wind? Why, then, did you go out? Was it to see a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they who wear soft raiment are in King's houses. Why was it then you went out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. For all the prophets and the law were until John. Verily I say unto you, among those born of women there is no one greater<sup>2</sup> than John the Baptist.' If the interpretation of the words 'more than a prophet' be reserved for the present,

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1. The Beginnings of Christianity, I, i, p.331.

2. This translation is based upon a slight alteration of the punctuation in verses 7,8,9 which gives more force and point to the questions of Jesus.

the remainder of the speech requires little comment. It expresses unreserved admiration of the personality of John the Baptist. John was not a reed shaken by the wind, a mere crazy fanatic, bowing to the breath of popular opinion, but a man of strong, upright and determined character. He was not a man clothed in soft raiment, a man who saw to his bodily comforts before all else, but a downright earnest man evincing an intense austerity of life. He showed, in fact, by his manner of life and by his teaching that he had, in reality, a vital message to deliver to the world, and this stamped him as a prophet in the truest sense. It is impossible to believe that such a panegyric with its closing words - 'none is greater than John' - would ever have been invented in view of the tendency of tradition to minimise John's significance before Jesus. Indeed, so illuminating a character study as this confirms the belief that the relations between Jesus and John extended over a longer period than the Synoptists allow, and that these relations were of the very friendliest nature until the last.

In the simile which follows, it is the solidarity between the work of Jesus and John, despite their different methods of approach, which is emphasised.<sup>1</sup> The variants

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1. Matt.11:16-19 = Lk.7:31-35.



between Matthew and Luke are slight and unimportant. Luke, as usual, gives the fuller version. The verses fall into two groups, (a) the simile itself, and (b) the application. According to Matthew, Jesus says, (a) 'Whereunto, then, shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets and calling unto their fellows and saying: "We have piped unto you, but you have not danced: we have mourned unto you, but you have not lamented." (b) For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say: "He hath a devil." The Son of Man came (ἡλθε), (ἐλάλυσθε Perfect, in Luke), eating and drinking and they say: "Behold a glutton, a wine-bibber, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!" But Wisdom is vindicated by all her children.' Dibelius thinks that the application (b) is not original to the thought of Jesus, but reflects the point of view of the early community.<sup>1</sup> In support of his opinion he points out, first, the use by Jesus of the title Son of Man, which he almost certainly did not employ before Caesarea Philippi, second, the Perfect (ἐλάλυσθε) suggesting a perspective of past events, and third, the "Community Saying", 'Wisdom is vindicated by all her children'. In spite of these arguments, it seems to the present writer that the application may well rest upon an original saying

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1. J.d.T., pp.18-20.

of Jesus which has been altered to some extent by the Evangelists themselves. Thus 'Son of Man' stands for 'I' in the original saying of Jesus, while the Lucan Perfect need not be taken essentially as suggesting a perspective of past events, but may well have been an original word of Jesus = 'I am come' (Perfect with Present force). Whether the saying, 'Wisdom is vindicated by all her children' is to be regarded as editorial depends upon the attitude taken to Matthew's compository methods. It is true that Matthew shews a tendency to add such conclusions, but even so, it seems rather arbitrary to dismiss the saying on these grounds alone. The possibility still remains that it may have been an original word of Jesus.

If it be admitted, then, that the application (b), no less than the simile itself (a), is authentic, the resultant sense is clear, provided the details are not unduly pressed. If this is done, endless and quite needless difficulties arise. Plainly, the picture in the mind of Jesus was that of a group of children calling their fellows to play at a wedding or at holding a funeral. Their comrades refuse, and those who proposed the game grow angry. In the end, they all start shouting and quarrelling among themselves, and have no game at all. The real point of the simile lies therefore in nothing more than the childish

quarrelsomeness and sulkiness of children at their games. The application is then made in a broad and general way. The generation resembles quarrelsome children in that they refused to listen to Jesus and John. John, the austere, they branded a madman for his very austerity of life, and Jesus, who entered into social activities, they called a glutton and a tippler, for his greater freedom of habits. Like the sulky children the generation ended up by following neither John nor Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus concludes, 'Wisdom is vindicated by all her children.' This saying has caused the commentators very great perplexity, but the simplest and perhaps the best interpretation is that the Divine Wisdom (Proverbs 1:20) has been vindicated at least by those of the pettish generation who did indeed hearken to John's call to repentance, or who did<sup>1</sup> cast in their lot with Jesus. Thus, while illustrating

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1. Σοφία is here probably a personification of the Divine Wisdom - a personification fairly common in the Wisdom Literature. (Cf. Job, 28:12,20,23; Prov.8:22-31; Ecclus. 24). Perhaps the saying is a direct quotation from some lost Wisdom-Book. σοφία is elsewhere used in the N.T. = prudence, in a good sense, and = worldly wisdom, in a bad sense. Besides the explanation of the saying given in the text, two others, at least, are therefore possible. (a) The 'children of wisdom' are the Baptist and Jesus: the prudence of these two teachers, despite criticism, has been vindicated by their work. This seems, however, to be an involved manner of speaking. (b) The 'children of Wisdom' are the Pharisees in the audience: thus, "the shallow wisdom of these critics has been vindicated by the use of epithets borrowed from such wisdom's armoury." This interpretation is too subtle, and far-fetched, and presupposes a limitation of the saying to the Pharisees, of which there is no clear indication in the text. For this note acknowledgment is due to Blakiston: John the Baptist, pp.225-227.

the difference between the practices of Jesus and John, the saying emphasises the essential solidarity which, for Jesus, existed between his own work and the work of John. It is, in fact, another testimony to the Baptist's greatness, and suggests, once again, more than a fleeting contact between Jesus and John.

In the original testimony of Jesus to John's personality, there is, therefore, it would seem, no word of censure, but only the highest praise. The efforts of tradition to modify this picture have not been completely successful, for it is not difficult to trace where the later hand has been at work, altering and modifying the original portrait.

To turn now to the second point - the identification of John with Elijah: if such an identification could be regarded as integral to the thought of Jesus, it would have a highly important bearing upon his Messianic consciousness.

The problem may be posed as follows: (a) Did the Elijah identification form part of the public panegyric of Jesus on the Baptist's personality, or (b) was the identification made by Jesus in esoteric fashion to his disciples only, or (c) was the identification the product of the early Church, in that once Jesus had been worshipped as Messiah, John the Baptist came to be regarded as the Elijah?

If Matt. 11:10 = Lk. 7:27, and Matt. 11:14 are in their proper context and setting, then the first view must be accepted. Jesus is reported as saying, 'For this is he of whom it is written, Behold I send my messenger before thy face who will prepare thy way before thee', and 'If you will receive it, he (John) is Elias which was to come.' These verses are based on Malachi 3:1 and 4:5 which foretell the appearance of the Elijah immediately preceding the Day of the Lord. The Elijah belief was apparently much elaborated in Scribal tradition with Messianic connotations, and in Ecclus.<sup>48</sup> his function was 'to pacify anger before it break forth into wrath: to turn the heart of the father unto the son and to restore the tribes of Jacob.' At the beginning of the first century A.D. the belief was widespread, as may be judged from the popular estimates, to be noted presently, of John and Jesus being that figure.<sup>1</sup> If the close association in popular thought between the Elijah and the Messiah is borne in mind, it would seem to be not altogether easy to regard the public identification of John with Elijah as authentic.

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1. The widespread belief in the reappearance of Elijah lends a certain colour to the thesis of Schweitzer: The Quest of the Historical Jesus, pp.360-395, viz. that John foretold the coming not of the Messiah but of Elijah. The theory involves, however, a very strained interpretation of John's baptism, as sanctifying men for the reception of Holy Spirit. It seems much more natural to accept the traditional view that John foretold the coming of the Messiah.

If authentic, it is strange that the populace were identifying Jesus with Elijah. Rumours to this effect are reported in Mk.6:14-16 = Lk.9:7-9, in connection with Herod's opinion that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead. The same rumours are reported by the disciples of Jesus immediately before Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, Mk.8:27-30 = Matt. 16:13-28 = Lk.9:18-27. Had Jesus publicly identified John with the Elijah, it is hardly possible that such rumours would have arisen regarding his own Person. Again, it is scarcely likely that if the public identification of John with Elijah had been a fact well-established in tradition, the Fourth Evangelist would have allowed John's denial to stand, 'I am not Elijah', Jn.1:21. Lastly, it is improbable that Jesus, at this point in his ministry, would have announced his Messiahship to the people. The identification of John with Elijah would suggest the corollary that Jesus himself was Messiah, and even although many of the people might not have drawn the inference because their Messianic expectations led them to look for a Messiah whose attributes were different from those of Jesus, it is improbable that all would not have done so, and in particular, his own disciples. Yet at Caesarea Philippi and at the Transfiguration Jesus found it necessary to repeat his announcement

more explicitly to his disciples, who, in turn, showed no knowledge of the fact that John had been publicly identified with Elijah. In view of this, it seems that the public identification of John with Elijah in Matt.11:10 = Lk.7:27 and in Matt.11:14 is almost certainly ~~un~~authentic. It must be supposed, then, either that these verses are a product of the early Church, or that the identification rests upon a saying of Jesus communicated to his disciples privately. Between these two possibilities a decision must now be attempted.

If the Marcan and the Matthaean accounts of the Transfiguration and of the incident immediately thereafter are allowed an historical basis, then the latter view may be accepted. If Turner's re-arrangement<sup>1</sup> of Mk.9:9-13 is adopted, the Elijah-identification appears as follows, 'v.9 And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged the disciples that they should tell no man what things they had seen, save when the Son of Man should have risen again from the dead. v.10 And the disciples kept the saying, questioning among themselves what the rising again from the dead should mean, v.12b and how it is written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be set at nought. v.11 And they asked him saying, Why do the

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1. The Study of the New Testament, p.61.

scribes say that Elijah must first come? v.12a And he answered and said, Elijah is come and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed even as it is written of him.' Matthew adds, 'Likewise also shall the Son of Man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.'<sup>1</sup> Can these words be regarded as authentic, if not in toto, at least in part?

There has been a tendency in recent times to regard Mark's narrative from Caesarea Philippi onwards as containing very little genuine history. "The Marcan narrative", writes J.Weiss, "becomes at this point virtually an impressive sermon addressed to the reader. It enshrines in the guise of narration the kernel of a religious ethic appropriate to the martyr and missionary Church of Nero's time."<sup>2</sup> Similarly Wellhausen, "The situation and mood of the early Christian community are reflected beforehand in Jesus as he goes forward to meet his fate."<sup>3</sup> For some writers, therefore, the transfiguration of Jesus and the predictions of his Passion are to be regarded as the product of subsequent Christian fantasy and Christological preoccupations. As far as the predictions of suffering are concerned, however, it seems to the present writer that a

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1. Matt.16:12b-13.

2. Die Schriften des N.T., i, p.145, cited by Rawlinson: op.cit., p.108.

3. Das Evangelium Marci, p.66, cited by Rawlinson: op.cit., p.109.



sympathetic study of the thought of Jesus makes it altogether probable that these were historical. It is impossible to enter here into a study of this complex problem, but the position may be summed up quite admirably in the significant words of E.F.Scott, "We can have little doubt that Jesus identified the Suffering Servant of the Lord with the Messiah. When we allow for the continual influence on him of the great passage in Isaiah, we can no longer regard the predictions of his suffering and death as purely unhistorical. They may have come down to us, it may be granted, in a stereotyped form and recur at regular intervals according to a given scheme. To this extent they betray a literary origin ... yet their substantial authenticity need not be questioned."<sup>1</sup>

The Elijah-identification enshrined in the Gospel passage quoted above has often been regarded as entirely unhistorical. Dibelius, for example, writes, "The passage contains theological ideas. Three expectations are put forward, the coming of Elias, the suffering of Elias, the Suffering of the Messiah ... Can this theological composition really have been original to Jesus?"<sup>2</sup> He concludes that this is unlikely, but that certainty is impossible owing to the difficulty of reconstructing the original form

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1. The Kingdom and the Messiah, p.222.

2. J.d.T., p.31.

and setting of the period. It is true, that even with Turner's rearrangement of the verses, the passage is somewhat obscure, in particular, the connection between v.12b and v.11. Yet despite the obscurity provided that the narrative of the Transfiguration of Jesus and the predictions of his Passion are allowed some historical basis, it is not impossible to regard the passage under discussion as being in its original setting, and for the most part, in its original form, as it stands.

According to Mark, the Transfiguration took place six days, according to Luke, eight days after the prediction by Jesus of his Passion at Caesarea Philippi. The careful dating of the event is to be observed, suggesting a certain connection between the two episodes. What was this connection? Clearly, at Caesarea Philippi the disciples of Jesus had received a profound shock on learning that their Master was to suffer and die. The announcement of such a destiny was quite incompatible with the traditional Messianic role, and left them in bewilderment. A week later they were granted some kind of vision of Jesus transfigured in prayer, together with Moses and Elijah, and with the passing of the vision Jesus apparently repeated his prediction of Suffering. Now although the purpose of this vision was to show that the Messiahship of

Jesus in its fullest sense lay in the future, it is not surprising that the disciples did not at once grasp the real import of their experience. The idea of a Suffering Messiah still remained very strange to them, but the appearance of Elijah in the vision started in their minds a train of thought which ultimately found expression in the question, 'Why do the scribes say that Elijah must first come?' It is possible, perhaps, to trace the train of thought leading to this question. Jesus had revealed his Messiahship at Caesarea Philippi: he had just appeared to his disciples transfigured in a vision: on both occasions he had indicated that he must suffer and die. But the disciples could not comprehend these things. Though unwilling to doubt the accuracy of Jesus' pronouncement at Caesarea Philippi, they ventured, humanly enough, to interrogate him about the Elijah of popular expectations, hoping, thereby, perhaps, by raising an objection, to elicit from Jesus further information. Jesus explained that the Elijah had already appeared, adding, 'They have done unto him whatsoever they listed even as it is written of him.' Certainly, it is nowhere written that Elijah would suffer, but probably Jesus was referring to some well-known prediction of an Elijah-Passion in an Apocryphal scripture now lost.<sup>1</sup> If Matthew's version

1. It is just possible, however, that the allusion may be to Jezebel's denunciation of Elijah (Kings, 19:2, 10) which found its ultimate victim in John the Baptist, through Herodias, the new Jezebel.

is accepted, Jesus continues, 'Likewise also shall the Son of Man suffer of them', a saying which, if original, can be explained by the theory of the Suffering Messiah already indicated. Finally, Matthew concludes, 'Then understood the disciples that he spoke of John the Baptist.' The editorial nature of this verse is quite unmistakable, but, at the same time, there is reason to believe that the Elijah-identification was communicated by Jesus esoterically to his disciples at this point, and that the editorial note is based on genuine historical reminiscences.

If it be admitted that the Elijah passage stands in its original setting after the Transfiguration of Jesus, as seems not unreasonable,<sup>1</sup> it is to be observed that the reference of Jesus to the Elijah redivivus and to his own Passion was made not long after the execution of John the Baptist. Now it has been shown in another place that the imprisonment of John the Baptist was for Jesus the signal to commence his own ministry, and it is of crucial importance to note that not long after John's imprisonment Jesus appears to have been conscious that he, too, would suffer like John.<sup>2</sup> Many critics have felt that this passage is so thoroughly out of harmony with the mood of hopefulness which pervades the earlier teaching of Jesus,

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1. An alternative setting might be after 8:38, i.e. after the second prediction of Suffering.

2. Mk.2:18-20.

that they would assign it to a later period. But this is quite arbitrary. It is very difficult to think of any reason why Mark should have ante-dated this particular saying in view of the fact that elsewhere he assumes that the predictions of Suffering began only after Caesarea Philippi. The historical situation is quite intelligible. John had been imprisoned, but not yet executed. His disciples were holding a special fast because their master had been taken away. It can only be supposed that Mark's account of Jesus' prediction of Suffering at this point is based on historical fact, and that the tradition was too strong for him to ignore it. There are, then, the following parallels:-

Imprisonment of John the Baptist.	Jesus' prediction of death.
Death of John the Baptist.	Jesus' prediction of death. Avowal of his Messiahship. Saying about the Elijah.

On both occasions, Jesus' prediction of his Suffering follows shortly after the same fate had overtaken the Baptist. The inference is that Jesus believed his own destiny to be linked up in some mysterious way with that of John. As it had been with John, so it would be with the Messiah. John, in fact, was the Elijah redivivus in a spiritual sense, and this identification was made by Jesus

to his disciples esoterically. If, however, at the time of the composition of the Gospels, the scribal objection against Christianity was still being urged, viz. that Elijah must first appear,<sup>1</sup> the best means of disposing of this objection would have been the method adopted by Matthew. Accordingly, in his Gospel, the Elijah-identification is presented not as an esoteric theory but as a proclamation to the people in general, while at the beginning of Mark's Gospel the same identification is made by some copyist<sup>2</sup> influenced, it would seem, by the same interests.

To draw out the full implication of the Elijah-identification would involve going too far afield. Yet the matter is so important, that the salient points may be set down.

Firstly, although the identification was not made to the disciples by Jesus before the revelation of his Messiahship, the Marcan passage considered above suggests that

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- 11 Cf. Justin: Dialogue c. Trypho, xlix, "For we Jews all expect that Christ will be a man of men and that Elias must anoint him when he is come; but if he of whom you speak be shewn to be Christ, one must conclude on all hands that he is a man born of men, although from Elias not having come, I do not consider that this is Christ."
  2. Mark 1:2. This verse is a 'proof-text'. As Mark himself shows no signs of dependence upon proof-texts, it is likely that the verse is a later insertion. In favour of this view are, further, (a) Matt. and Lk. omit the verse. Presumably, therefore, it did not stand in their copy of Mark. (b) The almost unbelievable error on Mark's part in assigning this quotation to Isaiah!

Jesus, from the opening stages of his ministry, had regarded John as Elijah redivivus in a spiritual way. Secondly, if Jesus had regarded John as Elijah redivivus from the first, it is to be presumed that he himself was conscious of his own Messiahship from the commencement of his public ministry. Thirdly, the injunctions to silence regarding his Messiahship are to be understood neither as indicating that Jesus was not sure of his Messiahship from the first,<sup>1</sup> nor as later additions in the interests of Christian dogma, nor by supposing that from Caesarea Philippi onwards Jesus decided to alter his plans and to identify himself openly with the promised Messiah and to arouse a Messianic agitation, nor on the ground that Jesus desired to avoid a premature clash with the Roman authorities, nor, finally, by the commonly accepted view that Jesus was afraid to reveal the real nature of his Messiahship at first, lest the purpose of his mission might be misunderstood. In certain of these opinions, there may be an element of truth, but the real reason was, it would seem, quite different. Jesus enjoined secrecy, because he preferred his hearers in each individual case to form their own decision, their own conclusion, from the evidence pre-

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1. So E.F.Scott: The Kingdom and the Messiah, pp.159ff., with references to Wrede: Das Messiasgeheimnis, Réville: Jesus of Nazareth, and Cairns, Christianity in the Modern World, respectively, for the other opinions cited.

sented to them, from the content and character of his message. Jesus never attempted to force the opinion of any man, but only to draw men unto him by the power of his Word. That is why, in reply to John's question, 'Art thou He?', Jesus did not reply, 'I am He', but pointed to his fulfilment of O.T. prophecies, leaving the Baptist to make his own decision. Only when Jesus felt that the time was short did he finally reveal his Messiahship openly. Lastly, Jesus was conscious from the first not only that he was Messiah, but that his Messiahship in its full sense lay in the future and that the way to his Messiahship would lead through Suffering and death. As the Kingdom lay in the future, so did his Messiahship. Yet, in a sense, he was Messiah not only in the future, but in the present, corresponding to his teaching that the influences of the future Kingdom were already making themselves felt in the world. At no time in his ministry did Jesus proclaim himself to be the victorious Messiah of popular expectations; rather, from the very first there was a hint of tragedy. In the suffering of the Baptist, Jesus perceived that his interpretation of the Suffering Servant passage in Isaiah, however strange that interpretation may have seemed even to Jesus himself, was confirmed. And whatever else the Suffering and death of Jesus might mean for the world, it



meant for Jesus before all else that thereby the Kingdom of God would be opened to every individual - to every individual who accepted his Word as Truth.

From the moment of his baptism by John, Jesus was Messiah, and already, perhaps, the shadow of Suffering was present. During his association with the Baptist, his Messianic consciousness had gradually ripened towards certainty. The imprisonment and death of John, in whom Jesus saw in a spiritual sense the Elijah redivivus, appear to have convinced him beyond all doubt that he, too, must suffer like Isaiah's Servant. For Jesus, therefore, John was 'more than a prophet'. He was the Elijah whose appearance heralded the approach of the Kingdom of God. If this thought is applied to the panegyric of Jesus on John in Matt.11:9ff, the text runs:-

'Why did you go out then? Was it to see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. For all the prophets and the Law were until John. Verily, I say unto you, among them born of women there is none greater than John the Baptist.'

The interpretation is clear. John was more than a prophet in the sense that, for Jesus himself, John was the Elijah, although, at this point, the public identification of John with the Elijah is improbable. 'All the prophets

and the Law had been until John' in the sense that now the age of preparation had been succeeded by the age of fulfilment. In virtue of his unique relationship to the Messiah, John was indeed 'greater than any man born of woman'. "Unawares to himself John had hastened the coming of the Messiah whom he had foretold. The claim of Jesus to Messiahship was indeed founded in the last resort on an inward conviction: but his estimate of John re-acted on that conviction and served to illuminate and strengthen it. In the suffering of the new Elijah at the hands of his enemies, he saw the foreshadowing of his own. The mission of John not only confirmed him in the knowledge of his great Vocation, but pointed out to him the road along which it would be accomplished."

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1. E.F.Scott: The Kingdom and the Messiah, p.87. -

CONCLUSION and RECONSTRUCTION.

John, the son of Zacharias, afterwards known as the Baptist, was born a few years before the commencement of the Christian era. The narrative of his birth, which is closely interwoven with the narrative of the birth of Jesus, and which need not be ascribed to a separate Baptist source, is largely due to the pious legend-building imagination, and can be used only with caution for chronological details. There is no reason to doubt, however, that John was of priestly descent. During his youth he familiarised himself with the Old Testament Scriptures and with current apocalyptic speculations, and his study of the latter seems to have been the determining factor in moulding the content of his thought.

At length John withdrew to the deserts - this would give rise to the tradition of the 'child in the deserts' - partly owing to his conviction that the manners of his countrymen were far from what they should have been, partly because he believed that the national Messianic notions of the vindication of Israel were mistaken. He imposed upon himself a rigid asceticism, donned the prophetic garb, and began an outspoken denunciation of the morals of Israel.

The appearance of a prophet at a time when men deemed

the age of prophecy to be past, at a time when the study of legalism held the field, had an instantaneous and tremendous effect. The report spread around that a prophet had appeared, and people of all classes became anxious to know whether, of a truth, they had lived to see a phenomenon hitherto for many a generation unfamiliar to Israel.

John drove home his message with a fearful intensity of spirit. In keeping with apocalyptic speculations he announced that the Day of the Lord was at hand, and that the Messiah in his capacity of Judge would appear and accomplish the great act of judgment by which sinners would utterly perish, while only the righteous would be gathered into the New Age, or the Kingdom of God. At the same time John combined these apocalyptic speculations with the sublimest passages of Old Testament prophecy in an original and daring way. The hour of judgment would not be as was commonly expected, the hour of deliverance and vengeance for Israel. Considerations of race would be of no avail. Each would be rewarded strictly according to his own merits, and the Kingdom of God would be opened to all, irrespective of race, who repented and changed their lives.

John was thus an eschatological preacher and not merely a teacher of virtue, as Josephus would have us believe. His genius lay in a skilful combination of escha-

tological ideas with a re-emphasis upon the moral law. With political issues John was not in the least concerned, and the Slavonic portrait of the Baptist, in which he seems to play a political role, may be dismissed on examination of its origin and history, as completely unhistorical. Individual judgment, not national judgment, was the keynote of John's preaching. The non-political nature of John's ministry distinguishes him sharply from all the pseudo-messiahs of the first century.

The initial stages of John's activity took place in the Wilderness of Judea, as distinct from the Jordan district, about 22 A.D.. Since the Evangelists are but little interested in the Baptist's independent ministry, it is only by careful examination of the Gospel texts that these initial stages are to be traced. In the Wilderness of Judea John offered no baptism, but simply announced the Coming of the Messiah and demanded repentance.

After a time John moved on to the South Jordan district, and introduced there his baptismal rite, a rite which explains, in large measure, the later practice of Christian baptism. The rite may have been inspired in part by contemporary baptism, e.g. the baptism of the Essenes, and in part by the prophecy in Ezekiel 47 and certain Psalms, but, in the last resort, allowance must be made for a daring originality on the part of its

originator, both in view of its form and its significance. In these respects no exact parallel can be found in contemporary baptisms. Although Josephus states that John's baptism was for bodily purification only, it seems certain that actually it was connected in some way with moral issues. It was, in fact, a baptism which demanded repentance, with the further implication that if repentance were duly put into practice, the baptised would have their sins remitted, and would pass through the coming baptism unscathed. Both in externals, as rejecting contemporary restrictive rules for baptism, and in its significance, as connected solely with moral issues, and as brought into close association with the Kingdom of God, John's rite was something absolutely new in the history of Jewish baptisms.

It is practically certain, judging by the emphasis which John laid upon 'fruits of repentance' that he assigned no sacramental efficacy to his rite. It was designed simply as a means to get the people together to take an eschatological oath to repent, and was intended to give a spectacular appeal to his demand for repentance, and to symbolise the purity of life which was essential for salvation. The history of baptisms, however, in particular the old animistic notions regarding the magical properties

of water, raises the presumption that many of the baptised would believe that the rite did possess a certain magical power.

Meanwhile, John gathered round him a certain number of disciples upon whom he enjoined rules for fasting and prayer. There is no convincing evidence that these disciples formed a highly organised group with a literature of their own, nor need such a conclusion be extracted from the Josephan phrase βαπτισμῷ συνιέναι. Since John believed that the end of the world was at hand, there would have been no point in such an organisation.

With the introduction of his baptismal rite, John drew even greater crowds than before, many expecting thereby to be saved from the fearful baptism which was to come, fearful, in that the coming baptism was to be one not with the Holy Spirit, as it is Christianised in the Gospels, but the baptism of Persian Apocalyptic thought, with wind and with fire.

As there is no reason to doubt the evidence which the Fourth Evangelist supplies as to the sites of John's baptism, although there is good reason, it would seem, to reject his account of the overlapping of the ministries of John and Jesus as unhistorical, it may be conjectured, perfectly naturally, that the Baptist, after working for

a time on the Judean side of the Jordan, crossed the river to Perea, and continued his ministry at Bethany. It would appear, however, that at this point, he raised the suspicions of Herod Antipas. The grounds for this suspicion are uncertain, but at any rate, John's appearance at Aenon near to Salim in Samaritan territory may be best explained by his desire to avoid a premature clash with Herod Antipas at that time.

While John was thus proclaiming the coming of the Messiah, and demanding the repentance of Israel, there was growing up in Galilee One who possessed in unique measure the sense of the Fatherhood and the Love of God. To Jesus came reports of John's ministry, and as these reports harmonised in no small measure with his own aspirations, Jesus determined to go and hear John for himself. Accompanied by some Galilaean friends, including Peter and others who later became his disciples, he made the journey to Aenon near to Salim, at no great distance from Galilee, where John was baptising. Jesus was at once arrested by the personality and the message of John. He accepted, in the main, John's view of the Kingdom, of the universality of its membership, and of the need for repentance, but at the same time, with his overwhelming conviction of the Love of God, he could not share John's portrait of a pitiless



Messiah who would condemn sinners without a chance. He may have perceived, too, that the baptism of John defeated in many cases its real purpose, giving men an opportunity to dispense with the essential discipline of repentance. At this point, therefore, there seems to have arisen a discussion between Jesus and John regarding the efficacy of baptism, of which only the barest hint is given by the Fourth Evangelist. This hint, however, is extremely valuable inasmuch as it is impossible to believe that such a discussion would ever have been invented in circles which derived their practice of baptism from Jesus. The Fourth Evangelist, himself, has apparently been at pains to obscure the real nature of the conversation and his representation of Jesus baptising alongside of John, and of the passing over of John's disciples to Jesus, may be regarded as *mise-en-scènes* for the purposes of polemic. That this was the real nature of the discussion is made more probable by the fact that there is no good tradition that either Jesus or his disciples baptised, and by the saying of Jesus on the storming of the Kingdom by men of violence, which can be very satisfactorily interpreted as referring to the results of John's baptismal rite.

Leaving Aenon John returned to the South Jordan district and Jesus accompanied him. Although Jesus did not

join the "inner circle" of John's disciples, there sprang up a fast friendship between the two. John continued to announce the coming of the Messiah, but his transcendental notion of that Figure prevented him from imagining, as yet, that his Friend might be the Messiah whom he foretold. Jesus, in turn, with the sense of his own Vocation growing daily, continued to ponder John's message, and to compare it with his own preoccupations, and in particular, with his own original interpretation of the Servant passages of Isaiah's prophecy. During this period of association with John, the possibility first occurred to Jesus that he himself might be the Messiah, and with that, the further possibility that John, in a spiritual sense, might be the Elijah redivivus, as he seems to have been regarded by some of his hearers. At length, Jesus felt that the time had come to leave John and to begin his own ministry. Fully realising that John's baptism meant nothing more for John himself than a demand for repentance - a demand which Jesus fully shared - Jesus presented himself for baptism, thereby indicating his thorough approval of that demand, and, at the same time, sealing his friendship. At the moment of his baptism, in an experience vouchsafed to Jesus alone, Jesus reached conviction that he was Messiah.

If the baptism of Jesus is dated in the autumn of

27 A.D., as the chronological data of Luke suggest, John's independent ministry must have begun much earlier. It seems most probable that the Evangelists have done less justice to John than he deserves as a preacher with a bold and, in certain respects, an original message. The ministry of John and his true relations with Jesus can be reconstructed only with difficulty, but once reconstructed, it is easier to understand the thought and the practices of Jesus himself.

Immediately after his baptism Jesus left John and spent some time in communion with his Father in prayer. In the interval, John apparently ventured again into the domains of Herod Antipas, possibly to reproach him for his alliance with Herodias. This time Herod, yielding to the machinations of his wife, and no doubt alarmed in addition by the stir which the Baptist was causing - the authorities would scarcely be able to distinguish non-political from political Messianic movements - ordered his arrest, and imprisoned him, not at Machaerus, but probably in some Galilean fortress. The news of John's arrest spread abroad, and this was, for Jesus, the final and unmistakable sign that the hour had struck to begin his own ministry.

From the very first, Jesus both perpetuated in large

measure the thought of his predecessor, and, at the same time, struck a new and different note. In no sense should the ministry of Jesus, even at the outset, be regarded as a direct continuation of John's in all its aspects. While agreeing entirely with John's non-political outlook, while retaining the eschatological view of the Kingdom, as equivalent to the Reign of God in which moral and spiritual values would operate, and whose fulness lay in the future, while proclaiming the universality of its membership and insisting upon the need of repentance, Jesus taught men that they had no claim to enter the Kingdom by right, by any efforts of their own. The Reign of God belonged essentially to God, and enjoyment of its benefits depended upon men's acceptance of God's forgiveness as a free gift. This did not mean that repentance was unnecessary. Rather, men had to realise through the discipline of repentance how necessary God's forgiveness, as offered to men in his Word, really was. For this reason, it would seem, Jesus did not follow John's practice of baptism, which afforded in popular opinion an easy way into the Kingdom. Naturally enough, only the barest hints of Jesus' attitude towards baptism appear in the Gospels, but these hints are extremely significant.

While the strong similarity in certain respects be-

tween the teaching of Jesus and the teaching of John gives great strength to the argument for a considerable period of contact between the two, the points of divergence illustrate very well the limitations of the Baptist's ministry. Powerful and of tremendous import while it lasted, it was not of a character calculated to endure. John had announced the necessity of repentance, but he had failed to enunciate any thorough-going principle by which this reformation could be carried out. He had insisted on the triumph of justice over mercy: he had announced Messianic forgiveness only in a very subsidiary way. Jesus, on the other hand, while not minimising the justice of God, taught from the first the Good News that mercy would triumph over justice. Unlike John, he went to sinners and invited them to accept as a free gift his Word of forgiveness.

Jesus called his own disciples in Galilee, and they constituted a body quite distinct from the Johannine group. Their earlier association with Jesus explains the readiness with which they then responded to his formal call. In keeping with his less austere view of life in general, Jesus imposed upon his disciples no rules for fasting. The indication, however, given by Jesus at the outset of his ministry - which there is no reason to regard as ante-dated - that one day his own disciples would hold a special mourn-

ing fast like that of John's disciples is very significant. It seems to show that Jesus regarded John's fortunes as being mysteriously bound up with his own, and suggests almost beyond all shadow of doubt that from that time Jesus was convinced that the way to Messiahship lay through suffering.

News of the ministry of Jesus reached John at length in prison, and there is no reason to question the historicity of his sending some of his disciples to enquire whether Jesus were in reality the Coming One of whom he had spoken. John's question illustrates, probably, not a waning faith but a doubtful hope, and confirms the fact that at no time had John recognised in Jesus the Messiah, but that he remained unconvinced till the last.

The Christian tradition, on the other hand, has made of John the precursor of Jesus. Although the words at the opening of Mark's Gospel, 'the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ', can be scarcely regarded as the Evangelist's attempt to integrate John in the Christian tradition - they have every appearance of being a title added to the Gospel as a whole and with a different significance - yet elsewhere there are numerous attempts to "Christianise" him. Thus the "Christianising" of the significance of the coming baptism, as one with the Holy Spirit, the conversation between

Jesus and John at the baptism of Jesus, Luke's statement that 'John evangelised the people' and, in particular, practically the whole account of John's relations with Jesus as recorded by the Fourth Evangelist, are to be noted. Yet the term precursor does quite admirably summarise the role of John in the history of religion. However much he clung to the past, retaining the cramping and outworn forms of Judaism, yet on several counts he had indeed been the precursor of Christianity. He had prepared his hearers, if not for Jesus, at least for the eschatological elements in the Gospel of Jesus: he had re-emphasised the moral law of the prophets: he had insisted upon the judgment, not of the nation, but of the individual. Above all in his vision of a universal Kingdom, he showed that he belonged not wholly to the old order, but also, in some measure, to the new.

Shortly after John had sent his disciples to Jesus, the end came. The details of the Gospel account may be legendary, but that John's execution fell about mid-way in the ministry of Jesus is extremely probable. There is no substantial evidence, as Eisler thinks, that John outlived Jesus. The chronological data are much more in favour of his early death.

The death of John profoundly affected Jesus, and shortly

thereafter, he seems to have identified the Baptist with Elijah, not publicly, but esoterically to his disciples. The significance of the Baptist is not therefore exhausted by his influence on the content of the teaching of Jesus. His significance extends further, even to confirming Jesus' estimate of his own Person and Destiny. In the death of John, Jesus saw once more the unmistakable sign of his own Passion, and once again his own original interpretation of the Suffering Servant passages of Scripture received irrefutable confirmation.

After John's execution, his disciples quickly dispersed. The evidence for the existence of a "continuing" Baptist group, who opposed the disciples of Jesus, and later, the early Church, has been altogether unduly exaggerated. The 'disciples' at Ephesus are probably not to be regarded as members of a continuing Johannine group, but as Christians, or rather half-Christians, who had not received the hall-mark of the Christian community, viz., Christian baptism with its gift of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the polemic in the Fourth Gospel is apparently directed not against a genuine Baptist group, but against a contemporary Jewish movement, which sought to attack Christianity, apparently with some little success, by exalting the claims of the Baptist at the expense of Christ, and this may be



the movement referred to in the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions. Finally, whatever may be the outcome of Mandaean research, it is not a little rash in the present state of investigation at least, to connect what appears to be an Eastern Gnostic sect with John's disciples, and to see in them descendants of a Nasoraean Baptist group. A study of the data seems to show that the evidence is much too slender to warrant any such conclusion.

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